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DIGGERS ABROAD

JOTTINGS BY A DIGGER OFFICER

BY

THOMAS A. WHITE

Captain, 13th Battalion, A.I.F.

Illustrated by David Barker

AUSTRALIA:

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To the Diggers

Remaining "Over There"

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CHAPTER I

Diggers Aboard

IT could hardly be called a *March*—that straggling promenade from the Show Ground to the troopship between 2 and 4 a.m. Wives, sweethearts, parents, relations of all degrees of nearness and dearness; friends; girls that some of us from away out-back had picked up in the city; all hung on to us, carrying our packs or anything they could, just to be doing something for us. Units were mixed, officers separated from their men, all too occupied in giving the last words of advice and encouragement to those they were leaving, to worry about each other. The final kisses were hastened by the Embarkation Staff, who had seen many such scenes. Then the pulling-out; the thousands of ribbons severing one by one, the cheers, coo-ees, good-byes, the Christian names and "Mum" and "Dad" called out to attract the last loving look, wave or thrown kiss; the silent sob, the loud cry as a mother breaks down, the lumps in the throats, the more and more distant coo-ees, and, then, the turning of the corner!

The official paying of six days' pay, the issuing of tin-ware and hammocks, reading of

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ship's orders, alarm-duties, and allotment of deck-space on the crowded ship, all went on listlessly. The Heads were gazed at until they too were left behind. The lighthouse blinked out imagined loving messages to us from our homes, until it too disappeared, and weariness took us below to sling our hammocks and quickly fall to sleep.

Interest in gulls, porpoises, Mother Carey's chickens, passing boats, albatrosses and the ship's speed, made the first fortnight fly. Then there were alarms, lectures, physical jerks, church parades, "house," and sports. All reading, games, and even drill, ceased for the few hours we were leaving the Leeuwin behind.

"If I get back to those rocks again, I'll be willing to walk or swim the rest," said a Longreach Digger.

And then the Leeuwin dropped below the horizon and we wondered when or whether we should see it again. After a good deal of uncertainty as to our destination—Egypt, India or the Cape—we found ourselves heading for Durban, and were told we could post letters up to the day before we reached there.

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CHAPTER II

Diggers Abroad

"IF ever we're kicked out of Australia we're coming to Durban."

"Righto! You'll be welcome."

"Three cheers for good old Durban!"

The whole ship takes up the rousing cheers as we pull out from Durban wharf. There are not many on the wharf, but they are bonny people. They cheer back at us; wave, and call out messages of "Good luck." We all have very pleasant recollections of the kindness of the Durbanites. May they remain long with us. Durban is a fine, pleasant city, with greenery everywhere; well-kept blocked and asphalted roads lead along the glorious Berea and into the hills.

The only thing the Durbanites felt inclined to grumble at in connection with us was that they themselves could not get a rickshaw while we were in port. The Zulus, waiting for an Australian, pretend not to see them, for the Australians toss them shillings and florins instead of threepences (tikis) for their runs. We spoiled the natives, so we were told, by giving them so much money, and more so by talking to them as we did. We had practically the free-

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dom of Durban while there—free trams and admission to all public institutions—baths, gardens, Zoo, etc., and we left the port laden with oranges and mandarines, brought down to the wharf by the women of Durban. Nearly every German shop in the city had been burnt down, even the Marines, called out to protect them, assisting in their destruction.

Except for plastering, the natives are in every trade, and we were all much amused by the black bosses stirring up the lazy ones with big sticks, the smacks, except for a momentary flare of anger, being taken in good part. Plastering is carried on by Australians who will not instruct the natives in it.

Our own cities might well copy the Tram-Parcel Delivery system of Durban. A penny ticket attached to a parcel takes it to the depot—generally an ordinary shop along the tramline—nearest its address, where another penny is paid on delivery. There are a few hours each day when the trams are not crowded with passengers.

Perhaps there is one Digger who doesn't want to see Durban again. Attracted by a black girl down to the Native Quarter he was mobbed and roughly handled by an angry, black crowd. A terrified fugitive, with about two-hundred after him, he luckily ran into a crowd of Diggers. I don't think he will ever go near a Native Quarter again.

At Capetown, the wife of a prominent Boer, who had fought against the British in 1900, but

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who now was fighting for us, remarked to those of us she was entertaining at tea—"The thing about you Australians that strikes us Capetown people most is your love for children and flowers. And how you and the New Zealanders like each other! I shall never forget the cheering there was from one boat to the other as a New Zealand transport entering passed an Australian leaving the port. We heard it quite plainly over a mile away. My word, it was enthusiastic! But then you Australians are so peculiar, for when two Australian transports passed each other near the docks there was no cheering, only plenty of rough remarks to each other, and questions about 'grub' and beer; and coo-ees as the boats drew apart."

Crossing the line we all ducked each other to our hearts' content. The Engineer reinforcements, including some of their officers, were specially picked on by the Infantry for ducking. A huge cartoon by an Infantry artist, depicting the ducking, and worded "In Memory of the Fallen Engineers, who Fell to the Level of the Common Infantry. By Gawd, the Taint!" caused much amusement.

At St. Vincent, in the Cape Verde Islands, were several British warships. The activity of German submarines working from the Canary Islands kept them busy. The natives from their canoes traded with us in fruit and "real" coral necklaces (made in Birmingham). To buy these some Diggers wrote out five shilling notes

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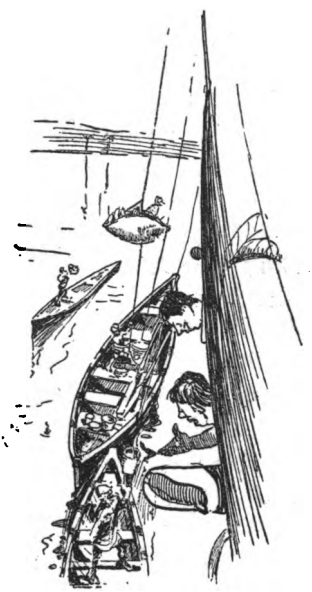
and passed them down the string explaining that they were new war money. Judge the chagrin of an officer from the boat deck who pulled up with his necklace three of these as change for his dinkum sovereign!



Five Shilling Notes!

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CHAPTER III

Ribemont—and other Billets

BILLETS are places; yes, they are; or supposititious places where we hang out between parades when we are not in the line. There are two kinds of billets in France—some are poor, others worse. They are generally rectangular in shape, with a big, liquid, strawy smell in the centre, near which our cookers stand. Sometimes it happens that quadrupedic tenants have to be removed before we can enter. We often perform this eviction in opposition to Monsieur's wishes. Generally, however, the occupants are so many in number, so small and lively that they cannot be removed unless they accompany us to the "Divvy" baths.

These billets, of course, being chatty, speak for themselves. Once, in Flanders, the farmer had to turn his old sow and ten piglets out before we entered, which was hard on them, as there was room enough for all. The farmer, pointing to the piglets, remarked "Australie mongee no bon!"

Billets may also be classified as (1) Clean; (2) Very Dirty. Class 2 are those generally most attractive to our billeting officer and party,

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and so may be said to be those generally occupied by our battalion. Class 1 are those entered by the successors to our battalion.

Billets, geographically speaking, are placed at the ends of series of long, muddy roads. They are always well-ventilated—towards the sky, as well as towards all the winds. But the principal use of billets is to give seconds-in-command a puzzle every morning trying to find out where a very small piece of old bread or rifle-rag is hidden, or why one dixie is half-an-inch ahead of the others in the line. Everything in the army has its uses.

At Ribemont our billets are broken-down stables with wire-netting bunks, all like islands in seas of mud. But here, being a "one-pip artist," my billet is in an Armstrong hut, surrounded by the squashiest, slimiest and vilest-looking mud I have every seen. At first one picks one's steps, but growing tired of that, or because it is useless, one soon walks straight through it, knee-deep. The hut floor thus soon becomes sloppy and muddy, except just where the valises are.

In spite of the mud, however, we carry out Company training and cleaning up each morning, and football matches each afternoon. "Second-Lieuts." are thus kept busy, to say nothing of censoring and picket duties. Marching out each morning we pass crowds of German prisoners scraping mud off the roads and spreading metal.

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As we pass them, each Digger seems to straighten up and put on a little swagger. He may not think directly about it, but his rifle is in a better position as he passes such a crowd than it was just before. The German N.C.O.'s salute our officers most punctiliously.

Last night we entertained the people at whose house we have our Mess. Monsieur, Madame, several friends, including poilus, and their children, all shared with us our Christmas parcels just received from home, cakes, biscuits, chocolates and cigarettes from our canteen, and wine. They wrote in my autograph book that they would ever fondly remember this winter's evening spent in the company of four Australian officers.

The father of four young children with us is home from Verdun on ten days' leave. He has been fighting since the beginning—twenty-seven months—and is now spending his leave working twelve hours a day in a woollen mill to earn some money.

The shop-keepers here make all they can out of Australians. "Australien plentee monee!" is a common expression. If a Digger wears a "Tommy" cap he can generally get things cheaper. If an Australian is seen taking a "buckshee" look at the town clock, they begin wondering what they can charge him for it.

This first winter in France—la belle France?—should test us thoroughly, for already (14th

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December) it is so cold that the French say it is the worst winter they can remember. Influenza is raging, five officers out of the six in my company being down with it; and the majority of the men have it severely. Maybe Fritz left some germs in a trench for us, for the M.O. says he doesn't quite understand it.

Oh, a French train journey! the remembrance of them will always bring a shiver. Sixty hours from Etaples to the battalion, and not sixty miles. Receiving orders to go forward, half-a-dozen of us—all "loots"—went to the B.O.R. at the "Bull-ring," and read on the time-table that trains for Amiens left at 8 a.m. and 3 p.m. Lobbing on the station at 3 p.m., expecting from experience to get away much later, we were astonished to see that the Amiens train had just gone. Of course we made a fuss and told the stationmaster in our best French that he had sent it off a minute too early.

"Mais, Monsieur," he replied "zee train eet ees not early, eet ees vairy late, vraiment!"

"Shouldn't it go at 3 p.m.?" he was asked.

"Ah oui, Monsieur, but also at 8 in zee mornings."

"Damn it, we can't wait here in this hole of a place until 8 to-morrow morning."

"Eet will be not necessaire, monsieur, for zee second train will go to Amiens to-night!"

"What do you mean? Haven't we just missed the 3 o'clock train?"

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"Ah! non, monsieur!" he replied, smilingly, "eet ees zee 8 o'clock of zee morning that you have not just taken."

We breakfasted next morning at Abbeville, less than 20 miles away, having caught the 3 o'clock train at 10. While breakfasting at the leading hotel, the smiling manageress handed us visiting cards with names and addresses on, remarking "Beaucoup mam'selle la! Plentee good for officier!" Imagine this in Australia!

CHAPTER IV

Coisy

A FINE church, with steeple visible for miles; slushy roads and yards, muddy duckponds and a dowdy chateau; hospitable, but money-grabbing people. Such was my first impression of Coisy, Cardonette, Raineville or Poulainville, farming villages within a few miles of Amiens, and known to all Diggers.

Madame, at our Mess, very plump, with rosy cheeks, and always smiling, makes potato-pie and omelettes for us every day.

A kind of influenza is still raging, seven out of eight officers in our company being down with it. I make cocoa for one each night in the billet, rub another with eucalyptus, poach an egg

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apiece for two others, and give another a mug of hot wine. The trenches don't remain behind when we leave them for a rest. I know I put madame's stove in a mess. She says "Pas bon!" I say "Pas compree!" and go on cooking. She knows I do "compree," but a few francs now and again keep them all in good humour.

The old chap—the monsieur—too deaf to go to the war, occasionally says "Pas bon!" I give him tobacco and cigarettes, and that puts him, too, in good humour. As French tobacco is absolutely the worst I have ever experienced, our tobacco is "très bon."

There is a dear little girl here who has taken quite a fancy to us, sitting on our knees, playing cockhorse on our feet, and embracing us all "Good-night." But she is only four. Here there are no demoiselles at all, all having left for the more settled districts, or to work in munition factories.

No wonder the French don't drink water, for the water supply in these villages is execrable, and even in cities like Boulogne the street pumps are still the only supply. Most villages haven't even a pump. I have been in scores of houses in many villages and have seen only one with a convenience, the garden or manure heap sufficing. The open footpath is often used, even when people are passing. One gets used to anything. Manure seems to be the most important thing in these parts as the fields have been worked so intensively for so many centuries.

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Many of these villages, if in Australia, would be pulled down by the Councils or Shires. But here the people are quite contented, for they have always lived this life and never desire anything else. Even if they did desire a change, they are generally too poor to make improvements on account of their pocket-handkerchief farms. They won't leave France either, for they love it too much to think of emigration.

In an Australian village with the population of Coisy there would be fine shops with large windows, three or four hotels, four churches, and a local paper; but here there is no shop-window of any kind, no local advertising, no concert hall, no street lighting or any other municipal enterprise. If a Booligal or Hillston shop, hotel or hall were transplanted here it would be the wonder of the town.

We wanted a hall for our Christmas dinner, but had to put up with a school room of about 30 child-power. The inhabitants wondered at our asking about a hall, and asked us if we thought we were in Paris. Battalion Headquarters offered £30 as the hire of a piano for ten days at Christmas, with £100 as guarantee, but there is no piano in the villages near here—villages containing a total of over 10,000 people.

To us these people seem to be without all recreation, personally dirty, and extremely provincial. For example, the people at my billet are the most prosperous in the village, yet they have never seen the sea, only about 40 miles

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away. They are extremely religious, for even in the filthiest, narrowest-alleyed villages there is always a splendid church—some quite modern, some as ancient as France. And as one enters any village the first thing seen is a huge crucifix as high as a telegraph pole with a life-sized model of Christ nailed thereon, spikes in hands and feet, and often red paint for blood.

Our Christmas dinners were wonderful, considering the price and scarcity of everything. We had soup, stuffed mutton—fifteen legs cost us £11 10s.—ham, roast-beef, potatoes, cabbages, onions, Australian plum pudding, nuts, ginger, raisins, sweets and cigarettes from Comforts, cigars, beer and wines, and plenty of everything. We also had paper plates and hired glasses. The officers acted as waiters before joining their men in eating and drinking.

CHAPTER V

Up the Line again

"Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid
Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire,
Hands that the rod of empire might have swayed,
Or waked to ecstasy the living lyre."

AS we entered Ribemont on our journey up the line again, the children ran out to meet and embrace us, remembering our colours from our previous visits. No sooner were we dismissed than many Diggers were

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surrounded by crowds of these young citizens, and escorted to their previous billets.

Every march-out means a thorough cleaning-up of not only our billets, but the town. The old "Brig." makes detailed inspections after we leave, and any material or rubbish left behind brings a strafing right down from him to the

"He won't find much here, Sir!"

Corporal per medium of Colonel, Adjutant, Captain, Lieutenant, C.S.M., and Sergeant. To "eye-wash" the "Brig." I have seen dozens of boxes of ammunition and bombs, and hundreds of pieces of valuable equipment dumped down wells to get them out of sight. "Eye-wash" in the army is the royal road to success.

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We started out from Ribemont in fours, and marched well past the "heads" at the "Starting-point," about a mile along the road, but after crossing the Albert-Amiens railway, near Dernancourt, the whole brigade was soon winding its way in single file almost knee-deep in sloppy slush along the new, hastily-made roads beyond Albert and Meaulte.

The tremendous traffic—motors of every description, or beyond description, from the huge lumbering lorry to the signaller's bike, caterpillar tractors, steam-engines and rollers, steam-wagons, smoking hundreds of company cookers with their grimy but cheery cooks preparing the next meal while they moved along, hundreds of horse-teams with their batteries, countless A.S.C. wagons, pack-mules, horses and limbers; lancers, with their long weapons, controlling the traffic; mess-carts; a general and his staff, well mounted; miles of pioneers ladling slush off the road with long-handled ladles, digging drains and widening roads without interfering with the traffic that had so continually splashed them that they had come to look like slush themselves; a dead-mule cart hurrying to shift a mule that had fallen dead from exposure and exhaustion—all soon lengthened out the battalion into irregular lumps, these into still more irregular lumps, these into twos and threes here and there, and so on until the whole brigade was in single straggle.

Everyone and everything was doing some-

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thing in the big show; silently and seriously for the most part, the only sounds being the spiteful bark of our anti-aircraft guns near the old German lines at Fricourt, the thundering of a naval gun from some trucks on that newly constructed railway near the military cemetery, the buzzing of aeroplanes somewhere, the hideous cries of a mule, the slish-wok (as the foot falls and rises), slish-wok, slish-wok, slish-wok, as the slush was churned by feet and hoofs, and the crunching of metal under the slush by wheels, and now a brass-band across on the other road.

The band suddenly roused us from our dreamy trudging, and was at once the only sound we heard. It was the Guards leading a column back from the trenches, and although their road was as slushy as ours, they marched in perfect fours, albeit with heavy packs, bruises, chafes, frost-bitten and swollen feet.

"Take me Back to Dear Old Blighty" was taken up by the Diggers; then "Keep the Home Fires Burning."

"They're good!" muttered a Digger.

"My oath!" replied his mate, with emphasis.

As the two roads came close together near "The Circus" the Guards came under a rapid fire of interrogations from the Diggers.

"Zay, choom, ah ee got a Woodbine aat o' work abaat ye?"

"Hullo, Jock! Have you seen a war knocking about anywhere?"

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"Say, Tommy, could you keep one down?"

"Cheerio, Scotty!"

These and dozens of other similar remarks greeted the Guards. Then once more the slish-wok, slish-wok, the spiteful barking of the same guns, the crunching of gravel and metal under that steam-roller, and the buzzing of planes. As we dreamily trudged and splashed on, there was no conversation, singing or whistling, but just the rhythmic, monotonous grinding and squelching, even these being only sub-consciously heard.

I spoke to "Fin," the elderly man whose feet had been giving him trouble since last time in.

"How are things, old chap?"

"Pretty good, sir; but I'm hoping my feet'll hang out till we've done this time in. I'm not as young as I used to be and my circulation's bad."

"You must go to the M.O."

"When we come out, sir. They'll be O.K. this time. Stan will rub them to-night and give them some whale-oil."

We had splashed on for another hour when someone ventured: "What did we come to this ——— show for?"

"Here's Goldie got another brain wave!"

"He's always getting brain waves," added a second.

"Goldie came because it's safer here than in Australia for him," added a third.

But Goldie, not easily offended, simply replied:

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"Oh, you shut your face and don't talk to an Original."

Goldie was proud of being an original member of the battalion and never missed an opportunity of rubbing it in to the "reinstoushments."

"Don't talk to an Original!"

At last, just at dark, we straggled into our huts in what was once Mametz Wood. Now there is not a stump. Our huts! Imagine a long, rusty

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cylindrical tank split lengthways into two equal parts; put floors and lining into them, and you have two of our huts. There are thousands of them arranged in lines and camps and called Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Brisbane, Perth, Hobart, and other Southern Cross names. Little Bourke Street is a row of dugouts along the sides of a sunken road; a group of German dugouts is "Woolloomooloo," the best dugout in the group glorying in the signboard "Potts' Point." A tent camp is pointed out as "Daceyville."

No sooner are we in our "split tanks" than we are served out a liberal helping of hot Maconochie which puts even the inveterate grumblers into a good humour, and we begin to wonder what the rum issue will be—whether 100 or 40 to a S.R.D. (jar).

CHAPTER VI

The Back-Forward-Area. General Brand

"*THAT* the General?" asked a new arrival, incredulously.

"Yes, that's Steve, the old Brig. You can always tell him by that old sheepskin. And that's Massa Johnston with him, carrying that bundle of newspapers for the troops. The old Brig. comes round the huts and gives us *John Bulls, Blighty, Daily Mails* and

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Aussie papers. He's always knocking about the cookers, too, tasting the stew, and so on," replied the old hand.

"Well, I bumped into him in the canteen last night, and thought he was one of us."

"Yes, he's always round the canteen, too. He's dead-nuts on it, and strafes when they haven't got a good stock in."

"But he can't judge distances," added a third.

"How's that?"

"Well, he said our last march was going to be only seventeen kilos, but it was nearer forty."

The subject was changed as the General approached and inspected the drains we were digging.

For a week we had been draining our camp and the roads nearby, salvaging the timber from old German dugouts, unloading sleepers, rails, and shells, making incinerators, and a hundred other necessary jobs. Several shells had come near us, and a heavy artillery duel had been going on incessantly for the past three days, the pandemonium, especially at night, being beyond imagination to those who have not lived through it. When the big gun just near us booms it seems as if our huts will collapse. The noise of the duel is like five-hundred thunderstorms arguing together as to which can make the greatest uproar. And the lightning is not wanting either, for there is not a second without hundreds of vivid flashes from the mouths of all sizes of guns.

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Still we go on with our fatigues, and none, except the new arrivals, notice the din. Many of the dugouts we have salvaged contained over two-hundred bunks, and electric lights and fans. The Germans evidently intended to stay here.

Unloading sleepers in the snow this morning I asked ten men to push eight loaded trucks along the line. They didn't think they could do it, and were much surprised at the ease with which the job was done.

"Blime," exclaimed one wit, "if we can do that on bully, what would we do on steak and onions for breakfast?"

We have been warmer here than we expected, for "A" Company is on guard over a coal dump at Montaubon. Each evening we send up a limber for a load of coal for the rest of the battalion. A few nights ago the Tommy officer in charge of the dump became suspicious about the guard and the coal, and paid a surprise visit. There was the coal walking away as fast as a dozen Diggers could make it.

"Halt those men! Halt those men! Sentry! Sentry!" he quickly exclaimed. "Halt those men!"

"Here, sir! Right, sir!" came from the sentry on the other side of the dump.

"What do you mean, sentry, by letting this coal be taken? Halt those men! Sentry, fire on them! Guard! Turn out! Sentry, I told you to fire on those men!"

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"If I fire, sir, I'll probably hit those huts there, full of men."

"Sergeant, come here. Place this sentry under close arrest for disobedience!"

"Very well, sir!" The coal had by this time

"Halt those men!"

got too far away for pursuit. The officer strafed all and sundry and reported the matter to the C.O. As the latter has benefited greatly from this dump, and as Captain Harry Murray is O.C. of the man under arrest, he will probably be exonerated and get similar jobs in the future.

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At mess last night, the General was present, and the Colonel gave him full particulars of this man's excellent record in the past, and pointed out how baseless the charge against him was. The General appeared to look very hard at the red stove in the centre of the hut. However, he said nothing, for the Colonel had timed it nicely, the telling of yarns had commenced, and good yarns always delighted the Brig.

"Coming out from Albert, to-day," related a captain, "we were delayed by the tremendous traffic near Fricourt, where the 13th Battalion are on traffic duty. Everyone had to keep quite close to the right of the road. The Grenadier Guards came along the middle of the road, marching in perfect fours.

" 'Keep over to the right!' ordered Billjim.

" 'We're the Guards!'

" 'Keep over to the right then, when I tell you!' ordered Billjim.

" 'We're the Guards!'

" 'Well, I don't care if you're the —— engine-drivers, you've got to keep to the right!' He had his way too."

"That's a goody!" exclaimed the Colonel.

"That man ought to get a stripe," remarked the General.

An officer of the 45th, just out from Gueudecourt, related:—

"Our men raided Fritz's trench last week and captured half-a-dozen Boches, among them being a real German corporal, who resented being

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captured by Australians. He strenuously objected to being led back. Two Diggers lugged him along in spite of his struggling, for prisoners were wanted. However, they were still in No-Man's-Land when the time came near for our barrage to commence, and it was necessary to reach our trench quickly. Still Fritz-Corporal struggled.

Then No. 1 Billjim took a Mills from his pocket, withdrew the pin, dropped the bomb in Fritz's pocket, and called out to his mate, "Run like hell, Bill! I've put a turnip in his pocket!"

When they next looked over the parapet there was no sign of the bombastic corporal.

CHAPTER VII

WELL FORWARD

"YOU want to get a wriggle on and duck over that ridge quickly!" a pioneer officer called out to us. "Four men had their heads blown off there this morning by one of our own shells from Delville sweeping over low."

We didn't wait to hear any more, but ducked down towards Flers as quickly as possible.

Since leaving Delville Wood with its hundreds of frozen, snow-sprinkled corpses — South Africans and Germans mainly—still unburied, our runner had lost us, for everything looked so

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much alike in the snow. However, from Flers, we soon found Company Headquarters in Gap Trench, although to dodge a heavy five-nine barrage coming over from the direction of Bapaume we went as far forward as Bull Road.

So here we are in Gap Trench, with shells of all sizes—our own and Fritz's—whistling and screaming overhead, and occasionally "putting the wind up us."

One gets used to anything. I always had a keen dislike to crawling into narrow holes or dark places where I had to remain in a stooping posture. I remember how I hated crawling through a low narrow passage in a West Wyalong mine, but here I am as happy as a rabbit in a burrow. I also know how a rabbit must feel when he knows he is likely to be "potted" if he goes out. However, we are cheerful bunnies; four of us cuddled up last night in the one pair of blankets, and it was "no-bon" for the outsiders.

We call it a dugout, but it is simply a cutting into the side of a sunken road with a sheet of tin and a layer of sandbags on top—just about shrapnel-proof. There is no water here until it gets a bit warm; then the roof thaws, gives us a shower-bath, and puts out our candles. Each morning my Balaclava cap has icicles around its mouth. My fountain pen is frozen; so I continually warm it against the candle. The water in my water-bottle hasn't thawed for near a week.

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"Write a description of the dugout," says my O.C..

"Impossible! but I'll just write a few impressions," I reply.

The O.C. and Freddie Doust are playing with their toes, trying to warm them. A candle is stuck on a sand-bag, and a fire of miniature flame and warmth, but enlarged smoking capacity, makes our faces black and our eyes watery. We are all longing for a condensed-milk tin of water to sponge them. We would be laughed at if we hinted at a real dish of water. Our bread on the floor in the corner among socks, boots, tin-hats, towels, cheese and jam, is frozen as hard as a rock, so hard that we have to hack it with a bayonet and then hold it in our mouths to thaw before chewing it. Jim Cooney, a splendid chap, one of our party, has just bumped his head on the roof. He knelt up too high.

Naturally the remarks caused by such a bump made the dugout quite warm for a few minutes. I must sit on the doorstep now—half in and half out—while he makes his bed. We take it in turns to sit out on the road. The dugout is three feet high in its highest part and slopes down to two feet; length six feet, and width five feet, do not allow much room for manoeuvres.

While I have been writing the above disjointed impressions, my batman has pushed in through the door an Arnott's cake tin filled with lumps of ice in which I hope to have a bath be-

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fore turning in. Captain Wells has commenced shaving in the corner with a candle fixed on a bayonet stuck in a sand-bag; Freddie is trying to sleep, and Jim is trying to get out without knocking the shaver, waking the sleeper, or upsetting the future bath. Not that he worries much about disturbing any of us; but, if he knocks the shaving-pot over, it falls on his own blanket, and if he bumps my bath, it will spill on his overcoat, upon which I rest my bare feet to keep them off the freezing floor. So he just has to be careful.

"K-e-rump!" A five-nine lobs right in the trench. Our candle goes out, and clods of frozen earth pour down on our roof. Before we can get out to see if anyone is hurt, we are reassured at hearing from the dugout nearest the burst: "You ——— ——— ——— Fritz!" every word emphatically pronounced. From the next dugout we hear: "Look out, Fritz! or you'll be hurting someone!" Looking into the dugout of the more emphatic exclamation, I find they are quite annoyed, as half their roof has fallen in right on their poker school.

Two Diggers were carrying a plank yesterday for a machine-gun emplacement, when a shell caught it, splintering it to pieces. When they recovered from their fright, they picked up the fragments for their braziers, to the great envy of their mates, for good firewood is scarce.

"I believe you did it purposely!" grumbled a jealous, shivering mate.

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"I thought we were getting a 'Blighty' out of it," remarked one.

"Our luck's dead out!" replied his mate.

. . . . . .

Although very tired with carrying timber, wire, iron, rations and ammunition every night

Their Poker School

for the past week, our men are simply fine, and all in good spirits. Unfortunately there is more in this game than the personal element, or we should end the war quickly; and rotters, who

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cause supplies or anything else to be delayed, whether they are capitalists or I.W.W. extremists, want quick shooting. Our bread issue is often fourteen to a loaf lately, instead of three.

The men are practically unanimous against having conscripts to help them. They are a bonny lot of cheerful grumblers; the less they have to do the more they grumble, unless they can see some reason for the work; the more they really have to do and the harder the time they are having, providing they feel that their work is helping to beat the Hun, the more cheerful they make out to be. And how they love anything from home, even plum-jam, of which we had an issue this morning! The general opinion is that it knocks spots off all other countries' brands, especially the Yankee stuff we have been getting so much of lately.

We have had a good many casualties every day lately. This evening we are moving forward into Grease and Shine Trenches to do a stunt and capture Stormy Trench to-morrow night. It promises to be a very hot one, as the 15th Battalion—equal to any in the A.I.F.—lost it after holding it for a few hours two nights ago. We have been carrying up tremendous lots of sand-bags, bombs, wire, picks and shovels, for our stunt. A great many extra batteries have been brought in. As each remaining man comes in to-morrow night—we left half the battalion out in Possum Trench so that enemy airmen might not see a crowd in our front line—he will

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carry, in addition to his own equipment, a load of bombs, ammunition, panniers, sand-bags, wire, picks, shovels, rum, water or food. He will also have sand-bags wrapped around his boots to prevent Fritz hearing the tramping, for our trenches are in places only eighty yards apart. After capturing, we are to consolidate and hold on to the position at all costs.

CHAPTER VIII

A "HOP-OVER." STORMY TRENCH (4.2.17)

THE 13th Battalion attack on Stormy Trench, near Gueudecourt, on the night of the 4th, was a magnificent piece of work. The barrage was just wonderful. Just about a minute before ten a gun barked out—perhaps as a warning to the others. We were all either in the hopping-off trench, or lying out in the open between Shine and Grease Trenches.

Patrols of officers and men had just come back from examining No-Man's-Land. It was frightfully cold, but no one felt it. The man next to me handed me a rum-jar and whispered "thirty-two," which meant a double-nip all round, the issue generally being sixty-four to a jar. I rolled on my side, took a mouthful, and passed it on. It reached the end of the platoon and came back again, many getting the second nip, while "One minute to go!" was passed along in

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whispers. Every officer had his watch out; they had been synchronized during the day.

There was a little tension all round, for we were going into the unknown.

Then a few guns barked out and the shells whizzed overhead. Some thought it was the barrage and commenced getting up, but they were quickly whispered down.

A couple of seconds passed. Two seconds to go. Each officer leaves his watch and grips his revolver. Each man feels it is about the time, and seizes his rifle more firmly.

Ten!

Exactly on the tick, 1,100 guns, including the famous Lahore Battery, belched out. Millions of spiteful snakes seemed to be hissing angrily above us, and the air and earth just in front of us to be filled with sudden, fiery, spikey, red and yellow balls of fire, which glowed for a fraction of a second and went out, but not before their places were taken by others just as fierce and spikey. The battalion, as one man, stood up and prepared to advance. In the glow of the bursting shells it was a glorious and never-to-be-forgotten sight—the whole battalion, except for carrying parties, in one long line, with officers spotted out in the gloom here and there just in the front. The men were anxious to get across, and had to be restrained.

A hundred yards in two minutes.

Never did two minutes seem so long. That wonderful line is halfway across; those sudden,

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fiery, spiked balls are just ahead, advancing also; the savage snakes are hissing overhead; and yet one can feel the silence, for there is not a word—only signs by officers waving their men back to keep them out of our own barrage. Some fall into shell holes; some get caught on barbed wire; but never a word; others help them silently and they take up the line again.

Then "C" Company bulges slightly ahead in one place, and a section is held up by an obstacle in another. Several knots of heavily-laden men are following us across. Everyone is peering ahead to catch a glimpse of the German trench, for we must be close to it now. Our shells are still sweeping into it and over it.

The swishes and hisses have lifted as suddenly and as spontaneously as they began. The two minutes are over. There is the trench not ten yards in front of us. Who got into it first no one knows.

We were all searching bewildered German prisoners, calling on them to come up from their dugouts, and dropping bombs down on those slow in responding, pointing to where we had just come from and making the prisoners run back that way, all in what appeared to be much less time than the two minutes really were. Then the Company Commanders fired their green flares up to let those in the rear know we were in possession. And the German barrage came down! It was on and over us. Captain McDonald fell just as he fired his success flare.

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The 14th Battalion, now occupying our hopping-off trenches, suffered severely, for these trenches were known to the enemy. (When I saw them a few days later they were practically obliterated). The German prisoners running back were also caught in it. Carriers and runners had to pass through it; they all won Victoria Crosses that night. The din of the two bombardments was hellish. The German shells were concentrated upon the eight-hundred yards of trench captured and the area to the rear of it. It was aimed at us from three quarters of the points of the compass, for we were in a sharp salient.

There were calls for stretcher-bearers everywhere, and wonderfully they got there and did their work. Many, with frightful wounds, waited their turn patiently, for the bearers were busy. Not a murmur of impatience, except from a wounded German officer who cried out in agony and pleaded to be attended to! His stomach had been cut right across with a piece of bomb. He had to wait until our own men were attended to. Another German with his two feet smashed into a frightful mass of bloody leather, flesh and bone pulp, sat uncomplainingly, smoking a cigarette a Digger had given him. Another Digger had also given him his water-bottle. These Germans and others were carried back to the R.A.P. the next night. We could not get them away sooner, for many of our own men had to wait fifteen hours.

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All night long the enemy counter-attacked, especially against the right, where Captain Harry Murray had his glorious "A" Company. Attack after attack—seven of them beaten back with tremendous German losses. On this flank they came from all directions, heavily showering egg-and-stick-bombs, and assisted by a heavy barrage. Their egg-bombs, being light and handy—weighing only nine ounces—could be thrown sixty yards, while our Mills' bomb—weighing twenty-two ounces—could be thrown only up to forty yards. We got over this disadvantage by having six-inch rods screwed into the bases of the Mills, and firing them out of our rifles with blank cartridges, which made them carry eighty-five yards. We were the first battalion on the British front to use them extensively in this way.

Our own artillery remained magnificent, their S.O.S. barrage coming down accurately within a few seconds after being called upon.

Lieut. McDowell, quite a boy, had charge of the bombers on our left, and made a great name for himself.

On the evening of the 5th, "A" Company, having suffered so terribly, was relieved by a company of the 16th Battalion (mainly Westralians).

The capture and holding of Stormy Trench was one of the smartest and finest pieces of work in this war. The Germans well knew the value of it, and so, to regain it, were prepared to make

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the terrible sacrifices they made in their repeated counter-attacks. It gives a view for miles to our rear—right back to Delville Wood; and in our front a view of the outskirts of Bapaume. Our artillery can now get observed fire on the roads from Bapaume towards Le Sars and Warlencourt.

The food we received in Stormy Trench was a credit to the A.I.F. Hot stew was supplied from large Thermos cans every night. Water was brought up to us in sand-bags. It was ice.

One has often to laugh at our men, even in critical circumstances. We caught some very big Germans. The men had sworn what they were going to do when they got the "blighters," but when they put up their hands—some knelt down with their hands up—they seemed disappointed.

"The blighters won't give a bloke a chance to stick them," I heard one man say. And Australians won't kill them unless in a fair fight. They give them cigarettes and generally patronize them. "The poor —— can't help it," is a common expression.

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CHAPTER IX

Tom M——

TOM M—— was known far and wide throughout every battalion in his division. "A great sport!" was the expression commonly used by those who knew him in expressing an opinion regarding him.

"A damn decent chap!" was the reply I received one day, when I mentioned his name to a friend of the 45th Battalion.

Tom's greatest assets were eyes that looked a man straight in the face, a cheery face and a happy smile that showed a row of magnificent teeth. His two most intimate friends were "Blue" and Charlie. These three had landed on Gallipoli together as privates and had been through many hells there together. Together they gained stripes and wounds. When they landed in France Tom had four wounds to his credit, "Blue" and Charlie three apiece. After Pozières they each got a card of thanks from the General for their gallantry in action. They were inwardly proud of these cards, but outwardly referred to them as "soup-tickets," as if not of the slightest value. Soup-ticket! They sent them home, registered, by the first post.

Then came their commissions. At Mouquet

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Farm and Pozières many gallant officers fell among the hundreds of gallant N.C.O.'s and men. And Tom, "Blue" and Charlie received their "coms." With no apparent, but with a great inward, pride each donned one "pip," Tom remarking that it felt as big as a pumpkin on his

The "first pip" feeling

shoulder. At Gueudecourt Tom led his platoon over close under the barrage, determined to be the first into the enemy's trench.

The instant the barrage lifted, in he jumped. Judge of his chagrin and surprise to find young Muir, the smallest man of his platoon, already there, scuffling with a big German. Over and

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over in the bottom of the trench they went, now one on top, now the other, both puffing and panting. A crowd of Australians gathered around to watch in the dim light, illuminated almost constantly by flares from the surprised enemy and shell-bursts. Tom, fearing his little man was getting the worst of the argument, tried to end the wrestling; but it was too lively.

"I'm damned if I know which one to shoot," he remarked, toying with his revolver. "Ah! I've got you!" joyfully, as he grabbed the collar of Fritz.

"Merci, Camarade."

"Never mind 'Merci Camarade,' get over the top and run for your life," pointing back to our rear. The prisoner needed no second bidding.

Early next morning German stretcher bearers came across to collect their wounded. It is a remarkable fact that in front of this particular Australian division the Germans always came out to collect their wounded, and mixed up with our bearers. Then, before hostilities again commenced, one side or the other would fire a shot in the air. This morning, however, four Germans were acting most suspiciously near Tom's end of the trench. They were apparently examining the ground and making notes of our position. Here Tom again distinguished himself among his men.

"I'll shift 'em," he remarked, as he climbed out of the trench and advanced towards them with his revolver. "I say, Fritz, none of your

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nonsense, compree! You compree! You've got to play dinkum. Compree dinkum. No? Well, compree sang (five) minutes? Compree this" (patting his revolver). "Sang minutes!" opening out his five fingers. "Imshi dong sang minutes!" They didn't wait even five seconds.

. . . . . .

The battalion was just about to advance into the Bullecourt stunt, when Tom doubled along to "Blue" and Charlie talking together.

"This is a messed-up show," he remarked. "If a chap doesn't come out you've got his address?"

The other two laughed, for they had been talking of the same thing.

"Here's 'Blue' says he's going to be knocked," said Charlie, "and I've got a feeling that by the law of averages it's my turn too."

"Damn the law of averages! It's not that that matters; but the rotten arrangements—no artillery!"

"If we reach the objective we'll be lucky."

"Well if I get to C11 in the Third London, it'll do me."

"C 5 for me!"

"A 4 will always do me! Well, cheerio! and the best of luck, 'Blue!' Same to you, Charlie!"

"Cheerio, Tom! Good luck!" both replied, as they shook hands with him, the first time they had ever done so.

Later in the day a few of the battalion

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straggled back, some helping wounded mates, some barely able to drag themselves along.

Tom had seen "Blue" and Charlie lying out there among hundreds of others from the brigade. But he himself was safely back.

He leaned against the front of the trench and thought of the day. Over twenty of the battalion officers had gone, and several hundred men. The whole brigade had been cut to pieces. What his thoughts were one cannot say.

Several minutes passed. He stood up on the top and looked back towards the littered field. His eye suddenly caught sight of "Baz," the little captain, lying dead some distance in front.

"I'll get his pocket-book and watch to send home for him," he remarked to a few Diggers near by, as he strolled calmly forward, quite careless of the sweeping of a score of machine guns.

He seemed to bear a charmed life, for he reached the little company commander. The bullets now swept low down over the parapet, and no one saw what happened.

When the sweeping ceased a little, the few Diggers looked for him. Then two crawled out to where he was lying alongside of his little O.C. "Baz." He had died with that same smile which had made so well-known to all his magnificent row of strong white teeth.

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CHAPTER X

A Contrast

THIS country—between Vignacourt and the Somme—should be beautiful in about a month's time, for already the trees are budding, and the frozen ground rapidly thawing. Most of the roads are bordered by long lines of high trees. What a contrast to the country up the Somme! Here everything is easy-going and peaceful; up there, the guns are still bellowing out death and devastation. There everything is blasted, trees splintered—even those two feet in diameter being smashed through with great lumps of iron—the ground torn and torn again into immense holes, with broken towns and farms strewn about. Even the sites of many villages cannot be found in the general chaos, for the building material not burnt has been crunched into the slush as road metal. But here, except for distant sounds and flashes, one can hardly realize there's a war on.

The French get the reputation of being excitable, but I have never met a more happy-go-lucky, unexcitable people. Just look at those two old women—both over 60—pulling that plough, while old grandfather steers it. They

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trudge along hour after hour from dawn till dark, up and down their ten-acre farm. In every field are women and children at work.

The old madame, with whom we are billeted, is quite delighted to act as our cook. She is a widow with twelve children—two sons already killed in action, two at present at Verdun, and one to be called up next month. Still she is cheerful. She gives us warm bricks every night for our beds, and much indeed do we appreciate them, for our feet are still tender after the line.

These people are a never-ending source of interest. It would take more than a book to describe even this family. A pretty little girl, aged nine, has just been making up to me; and, guessing she wanted something, I asked her what it was. Judge of my surprise when she replied "A bottle of beer, Mr.!" Her mother said it was quite all right, as her children all liked beer or champagne better than the chocolates we had given them. Her son, aged five, smokes cigarettes before her—all day long if he can get them. Her daughter, aged twenty, has been cutting soldiers' hair all the afternoon at half-a-franc each.

I shall never enjoy coffee again in France. It is always and everywhere ready, for the first thing one hears each morning is the coffee-grinder going. Each day some of these ground beans are added to the stockpot, and then more water. Here I have enjoyed it several times a day for over three weeks, and so madame cannot

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Half-a-franc each

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understand why I have just refused it. I told her I wasn't thirsty, and she returned it to the pot. She will continue offering it to me every quarter of an hour until she goes to bed. I shall continue to refuse, for while she was heating it up, she boiled seven eggs in it. How many dozens she has boiled in it during the past three weeks, goodness only knows! After she retires I am going to have an accident and knock the pot over.

CHAPTER XI

Beyond Bapaume

MARCH, 1917, took us through and beyond Bapaume. We had for weeks talked of Loupart Wood, in front of Bapaume, quite seriously, believing that its capture would be the funeral march of many of us. We saw its commanding position on our maps; our 'planes reported it strongly fortified, and guarded by mazes of barbed wire; as we neared it, its dark depths gave us an uncomfortable feeling.

We thought of Delville Wood with its hundreds of dead men—our own and the enemy's—many here and many there still unburied; the famous "corduroy" of this wood, formed by almost parallel bodies of scores and scores of the Boche. We remembered passing this "corduroy" time after time throughout the long winter of '16-'17, and our relief when the

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bodies were covered out of sight by the snow. We remembered other woods in this Somme district; and can it be wondered that Loupart Wood caused us some misgiving?

But here we were now right through Bapaume. Loupart Wood was left behind; aye, even Bapaume. We seemed to be in a new land, out of the war area altogether. The blasted, blighted, shell-pocked area of Albert, Fricourt, Mametz, Pozières, Mouquet Farm, Flers, Montaubon and Gueudecourt, where for miles there was not a square inch of ground that had not suffered from the hellish tornados of shells of all kinds—British and German—was now behind us. Here new green could be seen shooting smoothly up, and flowers. Aye, one could hear singing birds too—larks and nightingales. The whole battalion, from one end to the other, was whistling and singing. Instead of having to dig Fritz out of every inch of France here we were strolling along towards Douai. Our thoughts turned to the end of the war, and our return to our dearest and best at home.

"What does that six-footer of the 45th Battalion want?" I wonder, as I see him asking something of each platoon.

"Do any of you chaps remember Jim Latham who was killed at Mouquet Farm?" he asks.

"Yes, cobber, we're his mates."

"I was with him when he was killed, cobber."

"I'm his brother. Do you know if he was buried?"

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"Yes, cobber, we buried him between Mouquet Farm and Pozières. There's a cross with his name on it over him and six others."

"If he was your brother he was a damn decent chap, and he died game."

"Well, good day; good luck!"

"Cheerio, cobber! Same to you, old man!"

The stranger of the 45th was leaving the track to make for his own battalion, when a familiar voice startled him.

"Hold on, Bill" and a brother's hand gripped his, and two rough hardened faces met in an awkward, yet sincere kiss.

"You here, Ern? Well, I never! And you also are with the 13th?"

"Yes, I enlisted to be with Jim. But he's gone."

"You're too young for this game, old chap."

"I'm as good as any of them here to fight Fritz," proudly pointing to his battalion. And the two brothers, who had not met for over two years, since Bill had left home, marched along side by side for miles towards Bullecourt, the elder carrying the younger's rifle, until it was too late to go farther.

Ern was only seventeen when Bill had last seen him, for Bill had been on Gallipoli before coming to France. What they talked about as they marched along we can imagine. At last, they had to part.

"Well Ern, old chap, take care of yourself and keep your head down."

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"Take care of yourself, Bill, old man."

"I'll try and see you coming out."

"Righto!"

A firm grip, a desire to say something without being able to, a look into each other's eyes, a firmer grip, a "Cheerio, old man!" "Cheerio, Bill," and each went his way.

CHAPTER XII

BLIGHTY

I ONCE had an idea that the whole of England was a large city with millions of chimneys and miles of factory walls; but there are hundreds of miles of beautiful fields, groves and country roads, without a factory to be seen. Everything seems marvellously organized, from the London 'buses to the smallest farm.

I had as travelling companion between Oxford and London a fine old gentleman with whom I had an interesting conversation about Australian politics, George Reid, Barney Wise, Deakin and Hughes. As he left me he introduced himself as Sir Robert Buckle, Mayor of Oxford.

Arriving at Paddington in charge of two hundred men going on four days' disembarkation leave, I marched them to Horseferry Road. We picked up on our way a lot of filthy women (who seemed to be mostly foreign) trying to

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join up with the troops whom they knew to be new chums on their first visit to London. It is a damnable shame that the British Government doesn't do something drastic with these street prostitutes.

Referring to the counties, as seen from our train, a Digger remarked to me: "This country is so well looked after and so much like a beautiful picture, that I feel ashamed to throw a cigarette butt out of the window."

The leave passed far too quickly and we were all soon back on "The Pimple," near Codford, training strenuously.

Then came the King's Review of fifty-five thousand Australians. It made us all proud to see such men and such excellent marching. "Little Tich," of my platoon, was presented with his Military Medal by the King. He and George had a short conversation, which was as follows, according to an officer who was also receiving a decoration.

George: (after speaking about the winning of the medal) "You are rather small for an Australian soldier, are you not?"

Little Tich: " It's the best —— way to be over there, Sir."

The King laughed and patted him on the shoulder. Tich very seldom swears, but the excitement made it slip out.

The next Sunday, after Church Parade, the whole camp, of one thousand men, marched to the medical huts and went through a surprise

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He and George had a conversation

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medical inspection. As the crowd were seated on the grass awaiting their turn to pass the M.O.'s, the band marched past with a guard going on duty. It caused great amusement as it struck up, just when passing the crowd, "Who Were You With Last Night?" and brought still more applause by breaking forth on its return, into "Who's Your Lady Friend?"

During a walk the same afternoon, as I passed through Hanging Langford, I saw three Diggers conducting a religious meeting, almost the whole village attending in their Sunday best, providing forms and joining vigorously in the singing to the accompaniment of two cornets played by the Diggers.

The Diggers over here are like a broken bottle of kerosene in a box of groceries. They permeate everywhere.

CHAPTER XIII

A Troop Train in France

THE only advantage in being O.C. Troop-train is that one has a compartment to oneself, if compartment it can be called, for there is not a window, and hardly a door, on the whole train of forty-odd trucks and carriages. One is up all night dropping off two men here, an officer there, giving papers to one R.T.O., and having previous instructions altered by another.

My troubles started even before leaving

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Havre. The station was in darkness on account of Taubes, and in the march through the dark yards, a dozen Yanks had joined up with the Diggers without being seen by an officer. We were just ready to pull out when the R.T.O., two Yank officers and three Yank sergeants dashed up. The train was delayed while we searched for the missing Yanks.

"Some of your Australians and our men have had several fights lately, but they're the best of mates; and several Yanks have been heard to say that they were going up with the Aussies," a Yank officer remarked to me, as we flashed our torches into truck and carriage.

A few who were "shick" were quickly found, but the rest were difficult. It was only by ordering all in each compartment as we came to it to put on their "Digger" hats that we found them.

"Where's your hat?—and yours?—and yours?" I asked three bare-headed men, who were undoubtedly dinkum Diggers. They made good "Digger" excuses, but I knew their hats were on three Yanks among them. A look at their clothes brought the three to light, although two of them, wearing Australian tunics, "guessed" they were real Australians.

"Where did you come from?" I asked.

"Sydney," both replied. They were wearing 13th colours.

"What State is Sydney in?" I continued.

"I guess you've got me beat, sir!" "And me too!" So out they had to come.

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I have met a great many Americans—officers attached to our battalions for experience, and others at Southampton and Havre—and they seem to be a very splendid body indeed. Judging by their keenness and physique they should be very valuable when they start. A Yank officer with our battalion up near Hollebeke said to me, while I was showing him our gas-proof doors: "Look here, I want you to show me these things inside out, just as if I were a school kid. I thought I knew a lot about this war, but I find I know nothing. All my knowledge of bombs, gas, wiring and barrages, before I came here would not make a flea wink if it were written down and poked in his eye."

Another, later on, near Villers-Bretonneux, said to me: "We've got a lot to learn from you Australians, for you've been at this game since it started, while we've been sitting on the fence for three years." They appeal to me, and I think it's a jolly good thing they're on our side. They appear more serious and have a more businesslike manner than we, taking nothing for granted, but wanting every detail of everything.

The morning before this, while we were standing in the sun watching our "Archies" attempting to frighten five Fritz 'planes over our side, he had remarked to us: "I guess they call this a barrage?"

That same evening he learnt what a real barrage was, for an S.O.S. went up about 10 o'clock.

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After watching and listening to our heavies, field guns and machine guns going solidly for fifteen minutes, he ventured: "Well, I guess THIS is some barrage!"

To get back to the troop-train. Morning brought us to Rouen, and for the whole of that day we were "snailing" along between Rouen and Abbeville, along the beautiful Seine, through meadows, orchards of apples and pears, dairy districts and timber groves. We spent the second night still "snailing" between Abbeville and Calais where we had our second train-breakfast. Either the French are great muddlers with these trains, or the British and French authorities don't work together smoothly. For at Abbeville at 11 p.m. the French shunted the truck containing kits off our train on to a siding. Hastily waking up twenty men, we carried them back, and placed them in a second truck, finding it necessary to move several sleepy men to do so. At Etaples, this second kit truck was again shunted off and men again roused up to carry the kits across several lines. We were in the middle of this job when the train started, leaving myself, twelve men and a load of kits behind. It was necessary to make a tremendous fuss to have it brought back.

The country between Calais and Hazebrouck is very low, level and marshy, with plenty of old-fashioned mills. Apples and pears grow well, and there are large fields of beet, hay and lucerne. Hedges line the roads and fields as in

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England. Considering the boggy state of the country the roads are wonderfully good.

Why can't we have roads equal to these near Brewarrina, Coonamble and Hay? I remember seeing dozens of empty trucks going out on our railways to these places. As they pass good stone country it seems a shame that even a single truck should go out back without a load of metal. After being forty hours in a troop-train perhaps one's thoughts wander!

A tired and dirty-looking crowd we were when we detrained at Caestre after our forty-seven hours' journey. For the last seven hours at least we had all been in a bad humour, and the little French kiddies calling out along the line: "Bullee-beef! Beesceet! Pennee! Souvenir! Cigarette!" had received little attention.

CHAPTER XIV

Below Messines

As this was a quiet sector I was able to make jottings occasionally in my notebook. Here they are:

21st August, 1917, 2.30 p.m.—In Owl Trench, in the cellar of a Belgian farm which lies in ruins above us, and is only kept from falling in on us by a few sheets of German elephant-iron. Arrived here last night from Locre. Coming in we all had hot cocoa at Brigade Headquarters, near Messines, the old "Brig."

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himself supervising the issue. We drank it out of the cocoa tins. The men are in three German "pill-boxes." Sniped at coming in, but no casualties. The C.T. (communication trench), Fanny's Cut, was dry in places, but much knocked about. This trench is knee-deep in water, and falls in as fast as we duckboard and revet it. Raining heavily.

Early this morning, while we were carrying rations, bombs, barbed wire, corrugated iron, stakes, corkscrews, duckboards, rum and A-frames to the outposts, Fritz got on to us heavily with "rum-jars" and "pineapples." Our heavies soon quietened him.

23rd August, 6 p.m., Owl Trench.—About twenty aeroplanes are "scrapping" overhead. Three have fallen—one of our own. A Fritz 'plane comes low down over us every morning. It must be armoured, for we fired thousands of bullets at it when quite low over us, without apparent effect, although we must have hit it.

To-day and yesterday we salvaged from shell holes and old trenches:

119	rifles
40	overcoats
150	box-respirators
50	P.H. helmets
120	picks
175	shovels
120,000	rounds of S.A.A.
1,488	bombs
92	Lewis gun panniers

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203 steel helmets
240 tins of "bully"
75 web equipments
89 water bottles
67 mess tins
48 German rifles
219 bayonets
29 German bayonets
110 packs and haversacks
9 drums of cable
17 Reels of telephone wire
105 rolls of barbed wire

and about half-a-ton of odds and ends—trench-boots, socks, boots, stretchers, shell cases, etc.—not bad for one company after working all and every night. All this stuff will be sent back on the mule teams that bring up supplies, and will eventually reach Havre or Calais factories.

The trench is still very sloppy and smelly. There are many dead Germans lying unburied in shell holes, and many floating in craters. We have buried several.

The Belgian farmers of the future are sure to have accidents when ploughing, as no matter how well the place may be cleared up, there will still be hundreds of bombs and shells just under the ground waiting for a bump to send them off.

Four men killed and eight wounded to-day in the battalion. I am slightly "chatty."

"Micky" and "Paddy," the two tremendous German "minenwerfers" that worry our outposts so much, are again active. Our outposts

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are calling for retaliation. There goes our "hurry-up."

25th August, near Gapaard Farm, 6 p.m.—Enemy artillery and "minnies" are strafing our right front heavily. They have been troublesome all day, our "heavies" being called upon three times for retaliation. "Micky" and "Paddy" have changed their positions, and are still a nuisance, as we cannot spot where they are. Ten casualties to-day. We placed crosses over those not buried within view of the enemy. Those buried in the outposts have only very small unpainted crosses over them, as anything else would be an aiming mark for Fritz.

We improved our trench a good deal to-day by sand-bagging, revetting and duckboarding. We were heavily shelled this morning just after enemy 'planes returned to their own side. I am very "chatty" to-day. This trench is alive with rats—the largest and cheekiest I have ever seen.

The drivers of our mule-train are very "windy" and don't like waiting to be loaded with salvage. Two mules and a driver were hit last night by machine-gun bullets, which sweep low over our dump. This gun worries us each night by sending over "bursts" every few minutes all night long. We generally hear his "rat-a-tat" swinging around his sector of fire, and get down as he swings towards us, but the mules have to stand where they are, generally with the drivers on the far side of them. Two 14th Battalion

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men were killed near us by this gun early this morning. We buried them, and nailing two pieces of a rum-jar case together, made a cross, cutting their names with a pocket knife, and filling in the cut with indelible pencil.

27th August, Owl Trench Headquarters, 3.30 a.m.—Have just come in with my carrying parties from carrying rations, etc., to the outposts, for five hours in pitch darkness and heavy rain, slipping down waist-deep in shell-holes and old trenches repeatedly, getting caught in remnants of German entanglements, flopping down most ungracefully in the mud every time the enemy bullets swept across, or their shells screamed near; unloading and loading mules.

The bread ration is saturated, for the sandbags containing the loaves have all been not only in the rain for hours, but in shell-holes and trenches full of water. Men slipping have rolled on them. The darkness was made the more inky after the vivid flares along the outposts, and the gun-flashes every few seconds.

Fritz has been all night, and is still, pelting us with heavy stuff. There's the candle out again! Another hit on our roof and a heap of dirt all over our "Sig!" Again goes the candle! Still raining heavily. The outposts are having a bad time for they have no dugouts; and besides the rain, "Micky" and "Paddy" are again on to them. To make matters more cheerless for them there was no rum in the rations last night.

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4 a.m.—"The C.O. wants to speak to you, sir!" says the Sig.

"The rum is at the dump! Can you manage Cabbages and Turnips?" which, translated, means "Can you send it out to 'A' and 'D' Companies in the outposts?"

"Yes, sir; toute suite!" I reply.

5 a.m.—It meant an extra trip for eight carriers; but every man volunteered, grumbling, however, the while, because they think it should have come up with the first mule-train. They don't know that, on account of submarines, the rum issue has failed for whole divisions, nor the stupendous difficulties our transport men had to get this issue.

Every man and N.C.O. is so splendid, it is difficult to pick out the best. But Sergeant "Jerry" Oswald is quite a marvel at this carrying game; he always gets there with everything. His cheerful swearing and strafing of any one he suspects of loafing keeps all amused. In fact, we all are a cheerful lot of grumblers, jokers and swearers! Still mothers and wives will find many beautiful things in their sons and husbands that were not there when they kissed them goodbye. This life is filthy and hateful, but it brings out, in those in whom it is latent, a capacity for self-sacrifice, self-discipline, and thoughtfulness for others, which neither they, nor their most intimate friends, dreamt they had. Casualties about twenty last night.

28th August, midday, in Owl Trench.—Officers

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and N.C.O.'s of the 16th Manchesters have been making arrangements to take over from us to-morrow night.

Last night Fritz evidently saw our mule train coming over Messines Ridge in the moonlight, for he strafed us heavily with shells and bullets, killing two mules and wounding three men. His constant machine-gun fire made us keep to the trenches as far as they went, and so we were carrying knee and thigh-deep in water for hundreds of yards. Our constant draining and duckboarding has made our trench somewhat drier, although every now and again the sides fall in in places.

We had already buried the "Tommy" Major three times, although he was properly buried when we arrived here, but there he was, up again this morning. His luck was out; and so was Sergeant ———'s, for the O.C., seeing the Major lying there and his cross down, roared out:

"Didn't I tell you to bury the Major again?"

"I did, sir!"

"What? Again? I don't mean the first two occasions, but yesterday evening!"

"I had him buried yesterday evening again, sir."

"Well, you didn't do it properly! Get him fixed up again!"

As the Sergeant "fell in" his party with shovels again, each man grumbled audibly "——— the Major!"

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CHAPTER XV

When I was a Runner

IDENTIFICATION from our front was urgently wanted by the Army Intelligence Staff. So the poor old Infantry had to get it. We put over a tremendous "hurry up" on to Fritz with our three-inch and six-inch Stokes's. Then we rushed him and got several Identifications. Major Johnston, the "Beer-Emma," was at advanced Battalion Headquarters ringing up the "Brig." at rear Headquarters, and giving him details of the "hop-over."

"They are the 43rd Prussians, sir! And there's one that speaks English, sir! But he won't give any information." , . . .

"Very well, sir, he's going now, sir!"

"Here," said the Major to me, "take this prisoner," pointing to the officer who had spoken excellent English, "back to the General toute-suite." So off I marched my Fritz, giving him a cigarette and yarning casually with him about the weather and the length of the war.

Reaching Brigade Headquarters, we found the General waiting, anxious to question the prisoner in order to send some early information back to the Division.

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"Wait there, Thirteenth!" he said to me; and then he commenced operations on the officer, who had, on entering, saluted him smartly.

"You offissiay? You compree big bombardmong beaucoup cannong?"

The officer stood to attention without replying.

"You no compree me? You Prussian offissiay and no compree English?"

Still no reply.

The Brig. tried other tactics. He passed over a mug of cocoa, which was received with a "Thank you, sir!"

The Brig. looked up quickly. His new tactics were commencing all right. He would continue:

"You compree chocolat traybong, trayshowd?"

No reply.

"Traybong for winter, naishpar?"

Silence.

"Beaucoup Alleymans ong Bapaume, naishpar? Pas compree? Beaucoup grand . . . cannong . . . Alleyman . . . ong . . . Bapaume . . . No compree Anglais?"

The Fritz put his mug down without a word.

"Australie traybong soldatt? You beaucoup . . . combat . . . Australia . . . tray longtong?"

The Brig. gave it up.

"Get me 'Fact'! Major Johnston!" he ordered the signaller at his telephone.

"Major Johnston speaking, sir!" replied the signaller. The Brig. took up the 'phone.

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"I say, Johnston, I thought you said this officer could speak English! . . .

"What's that? . . . No! not a word, except 'Thank you.'"

As I marched him back towards the cage he remarked, as I lit a cigarette for him: "Your General's a funny cove, isn't he?"

CHAPTER XVI

The Relief

THEY began to come in after dark and kept dribbling in until after midnight, while we began going out at dark, and were dribbling out until 4 a.m. Every Digger felt sorry for those Tommies, for, in addition to their full packs, many had extra loads, and the mud was deep and sticky.

I could not help contrasting their silent, cheerless, heavy demeanour with the free, easy and light demeanour of the Australians going in last week. Although we were all thoroughly tired now, and especially footweary, there was a continual flow of cheery words from the Diggers to the Tommies. The latter generally replied cheerfully, but they never took the initiative in making the cheery remarks.

Our packs had been dumped at the transport lines, and in addition to our fighting-gear, we carried nothing except greatcoat and a ground

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sheet; while these Manchester Tommies, smaller and weaker than we, had all their belongings on them. In advance we pitied them coming out next week. Their officers going into the support line had many orderlies loaded up with valises and mess gear, while our officers had nothing beyond a few ground sheets and nine blankets between twenty-five of them—about the same proportion as among the other ranks.

At Brigade Headquarters we received hot pea soup. Then on we dribbled again until we reached Neuve Eglise, where we tossed ourselves down anywhere to sleep, without thinking of the hardness or dampness of the hut-floors or tents.

We could have slept for a week; but reveille went at eight, for we had to be at the baths at nine.

Those glorious hot showers at the Palmer Baths! And the more glorious feeling when we left with clean socks, singlets and underpants.

Then we got our packs, put on our Digger hats—a great joy after steel helmets for nine days—scraped the mud off our clothes, shaved, cleaned our boots, strolled along to the Estaminets, and spoke of anything at all except the war. We talked especially of our three months' rest, which we were at last really going to get, for hadn't the Brig. given us the "dinkum oil?"

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CHAPTER XVII

From Neuve Eglise to the Fruges Area

MY job on the march from Neuve Eglise back to Vieux Berquin, near where we embussed for Lisbourg in the Fruges Area, I shall always remember as my most rotten job in the war. I was O.C. rearguard, and was ordered to march six Digger prisoners, under fixed bayonets, behind the battalion, through Bailleul, Merris and Vieux Berquin.

To say that I was ashamed of the job would be putting it mildly, for we could very well have done without fixed bayonets, advertising to Tommies, Jocks, Froggies and Chinese, the fact that some Diggers had dodged the line or broken out of confinement. Besides the allied troops, many civilians of Bailleul came out to watch us march through. Two of my prisoners certainly had records that would, in any other army, have brought them the death penalty long before, but it wasn't fair to have the ninety-nine-and-a-half per cent. dinkums disgraced by such a procession. I was mightily pleased when we reached Verte Rue, where I handed them over.

Before embussing near here the next morning I was sent by my O.C. to fall the company in ready to march to the 'buses. Judge my amuse-

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"The Old Pot's got a platoon locked up"

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ment at seeing a very wild Frenchman, "physically jerking" his arms and shoulders, running up and down in front of half the company and waving a big key.

"The old pot's got a platoon locked up, and won't let them out until he gets 'soixante francs' —or something like that—for champagne they've souvenired," said the orderly sergeant.

After calming him a little, I found out he wanted sixty francs for six bottles of champagne he said they had stolen from his estaminet, in the attic of which they were billeted.

Being in a hurry to move, I paid him the sixty, and told the company it was up to those who had had the champagne to settle up with me. A little later they brought me the amount, remarking that it was well worth the money, as they had drunk four dozen bottles and had nailed up the cases again with the empties inside. They had not had time to nail up the half-dozen seen by monsieur.

The hundred and fifty motor 'buses soon covered the stretch between Merville and Lisbourg, the new Brigade Headquarters.

To pass away the time a few of us began counting the estaminets, but there were so many that we soon lost count, especially while arguing as to just what an estaminet really was. We then amused ourselves by reading their names.

How would these do for Australian hotels?—"The Big Blackberry," "The Little Pine Tree," "The Joyous Heart," "The Red Rooster," "The

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White Horse" (horses of all colours were represented), "The Jolly Farmer," "The Forget-all-Worries!" "The As-Good-As-Elsewhere," and "The Demure Christian."

CHAPTER XVIII

Dear Old Lisbourg

OUR three months' rest here should pass very pleasantly, for the people are doing everything possible to please and make us comfortable. Lisbourg and the neighbouring villages are all of the long, straggling, farming variety. The good, clean straw that is abundantly available is a godsend to the men after having to sleep so long on boards, bricks or bare ground.

We are the first Australians ever seen by these people, and the first troops billeted on them, except some English troops who spent a few days here in 1914. Milk and eggs are quite plentiful, and in every kitchen one can always find Diggers getting outside "grandes omelettes."

There are hundreds of little pigs—little red ones mainly—calves, quiet old horses and cows. We see children, aged four, driving pigs out into the fields in the morning and home again in the evenings. Many of these little swineherds

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thoroughly enjoy a cigarette as they follow their charges.

The women and children work very hard for long hours. Whole families—babies and all—go out into the fields at sunrise, taking a loaf of bread and a piece of bacon with them, and return only after sunset. It is a common sight to see the Diggers making haystacks, milking cows, driving drays or ploughs, mending gates and fences, or weeding and cutting beet in the fields with a whole French family.

When we arrived, the people had their homes locked up, and watched our coming with great anxiety, and even fear, but we were not here an hour before every door was open, omelettes frying on every stove, and everybody beaming with smiles as they tried to understand Digger French.

Their naturalness is lovable. Old Madame Richomme, with whom I am billeted, had never seen or heard of pyjamas until she saw mine when making my bed. They are nice new ones, with wide blue and white stripes, and quite attracted her admiration. The first morning when I came in from parade she asked me what they were, and did I wear them when I wanted to "swank," or, as she put it, for "beaucoup swank?"

When I told I *slept* in them, she opened her dear old eyes and mouth and raised her hands in utter astonishment, exclaiming the while—"Oh! la-la! la-la! la-la! monsieur! Jamais!"

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That evening, as I was getting to bed, she called out to me to walk out into the kitchen in them to be admired by the whole family. So I was soon the centre of an admiring crowd, including her daughter, Célinde, aged seventeen.

The centre of an admiring crowd

This did not end my ordeal; next night, out again I was called to be admired in them by all the neighbours, who had been specially invited for the display, and I had to assure them that I

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really did *sleep* in them; one old girl telling the others it seemed so foolish to get dressed to go to bed.

Célinde simply remarked, "Beaucoup swank!"

Célinde is quite a child of nature. Rosy cheeks, shiny dark eyes and white teeth, a healthy figure and a beaming smile, keep one's eyes for a time from noticing her large hands—very rough and cracked from field work—and her large feet. loosely encased in a pair of heavy military boots some Digger has given the family. She told me a few days ago that I must be very rich in Australia, and called me "Monsieur Lieutenant Beaucoup Swank!" I asked her why.

"Because you clean your teeth every day and always wash your hands and brush your hair when you come in to your meals."

This was her idea of what rich people did, and when I told her all Australians did the same, she asked me quite incredulously:

"Tous Australiens beaucoup swank comme vous?"

"Oui," I replied, but she doesn't believe me.

Célinde's main work is pulling up and cutting the tops off the white beet they grow for winter fodder. Consequently she is bending low from morn till eve. I tried the work, but a few minutes of it gave me a severe backache. No wonder all the old women droop forward from the small of the back, and are so round-shouldered.

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Parleying for a bath-tub

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Several Diggers have tried to help Célinde at her beet cutting, but she won't accept any help —walking away and working in the far end of the field as they approach.

The afternoon we arrived here I asked madame to let me have a big tub and plenty of hot water to have a bath. (I have yet to find a French house with a bath.) She brought me a basin of water, and it took a tremendous lot of explaining and illustrating to let her understand that I really wanted to get right into a tub, and actually to *sit* in it. Taking her to the barn, where I had seen a cider-tub, I got her permission to take it to my room.

I had just got comfortably in, and was sitting almost up to my armpits in it, with my head and shoulders well lathered, when madame, out of her intense curiosity as to what I was doing, opened the bedroom door and popped her head around.

It was too much for her. I am not good-looking at any time, but with soap in my eyes and over what there was of me sticking out of the tub——!

She clasped her hands and exclaimed in great astonishment: "Oh! la-la! la-la! Monsieur!" called out to her mother, and both hobbled in to have a look at me.

They afterwards told all the neighbours, and I wondered if I was to be asked to repeat the performance. That evening they told Célinde,

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who exclaimed "Jamais?" incredulously. I felt glad she was out working at the time.

This morning a military lorry killed one of Madame's many fowls that are always on the

"Oh! la-la! la-la! Monsieur!"

road. She immediately picked up the dead bird, chopped its head off, plucked and cleaned it, and sold it some Diggers for six francs.

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Among the 1,500 people living here, only about ten take a newspaper. I had great difficulty in borrowing a copy of *Le Matin, Le Petit Parisien,* or any other journal at all. An Australian town of this size would have probably two local papers. When I mentioned what I wanted I was told: "This is not Paris, Monsieur!"

They don't understand the expression "Going to Church;" it is always with them "Going to Mass." We found it quite difficult to tell them "We are going to church in the fields." This morning, while we were breakfasting in the kitchen, Madame, her mother and Célinde came in from their farm work, kicked off their clogs at the door, put on long lace-up boots, skirt, blouse and hat in front of us. There was nothing immodest about it, for they put them on over their field clothes. The two elderly ones were in black and heavily craped; Célinde in a tartan kind of check. When quite dressed, each wiped her face and hands with a damp rag, kept hanging on the mantelpiece for the purpose, and off they went. From their shiny, clean-looking faces, one would never dream they had had anything less than a Turkish bath.

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CHAPTER XIX

Back to the Line

A FORTNIGHT, and a very sudden move, instead of our long-promised three months' rest. No wonder we heard, "The poor 4th Divvy's come a gutser again!" "A real Annette!" and similar expressions, from our men.

The people of Lisbourg were really sorry to lose us, as they had, even within a fortnight, all learned to understand and love us. Practically the whole town wept as we shook hands "Good-bye," and as the 'buses started, "Bonne Fortune! "Bonne Fortune!" cheered us.

Debussing near Staples, we "slopped" along frightful roads to our billets in barns and muddy tents. As every place was crowded with troops moving up towards Ypres for the Passchendaele Push, billeting was uncomfortable. When a company has only enough room for a platoon, they are not in a humour to have a calf in with them, as was here the case. I asked the farmer to remove it, but he refused.

"We will eat it, then," I threatened.

"Your Government will then have to pay a big price for it," he replied.

The men only needed the hint to bundle it out.

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The farmer tried to push it back, so both he and his calf were bundled out, the calf into the field, the farmer into his manure-heap—accidentally, of course.

"We oughtuv drownded the cow!" one remarked.

The strongest Australian swear-word I know is "COW." When all other words fail to express just what a Digger wants to say about such as this farmer, "He's a FAIR COW!" just meets the case.

I have heard some decent and very expressive swearing among the Australians. The "Tommy" says nothing but two words over and over again, which soon becomes tiresome; but, even with his longer vocabulary, the Digger has to come to poor, harmless Mrs. Bull when he wants to express real, unadulterated contempt. I once heard an Australian bullocky, after swearing, lashing and prodding his bogged team futilely for half-an-hour, finish his remarks, as he disgustedly walked away, with "You Cows!" and the Digger has not yet beaten the bullocky.

All that night the new reinforcements were kept awake by the terrific cannonading going on incessantly east, north-east and south of us—from Nieuport to Armentières. This was repeated the whole of the next night, when we were camped near Steenvoorde, a day's march nearer Ypres.

The people here were no more civil, nor deserved shooting any less, than our calf-farmer

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friend of Staples. They are Flemish, and although living in France, they say they understand English better than French, because so many of our common words sound alike. They have swinish habits of eating and drinking, and not only look, but are, filthy in body and mind. Their two meals to-day consisted of vegetable soup and bread, and potatoes partly mashed in olive oil, and the noise they made slopping it up and breathing loudly while chewing, with their heads low down over their basins, was sickening. The women's faces had not been washed for weeks, I felt sure. They are certainly "coarse Flanders mares." It took some time to get the smell of their kitchen, with them in it, out of my nostrils.

As battalion interpreter I have had many claims to deal with. We generally try to settle these direct from our own battalion regimental funds, or by a levy on those responsible. Our transport men tethered mules to fruit trees and so ringbarked three of them. The claim was for one hundred francs, but the owner was prevailed upon to take eighty. A woman claimed fifty francs for a lost room-warmer; we searched her barn where a few Diggers had been billeted, found and restored it to her, to her great disappointment, for it was worth about ten francs.

A second woman claimed seventy francs for wood burnt by the troops; she quite agreeably took twenty-five as full payment. If these claims had gone on to Division we should have

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had to pay them in full, as our divisional claims officer always seems to order the full payment demanded, without taking much notice of the battalion's side of the question at all. He would probably have ordered us to pay for the gate and gate-post in the following case:—

Before the battalion marched out this morning a farmer reported to B.O.R. that the men had burnt his gate, for which he claimed seventy francs. I interviewed him. Yes, the Ausralians had stolen his gate, burnt it, and had even started on the post, when he came along and surprised them. It was worth two-hundred francs, but he would be satisfied with seventy. This made me suspicious. The Australians were thoughtless troops (and many very wicked), and they didn't realize how valuable the gate was. Yes, there were the new axe-marks, and some new chips.

I didn't like his manner and didn't believe him; so I placed the facts before the men and asked them to tell me "square dinkum" if the gate had been burnt in the billets. The Digger, when asked a straightout question, can always be relied on to give the "dinkum" answer. They were certain the gate had not been touched, although they had taken a rail of a fence lying on the ground in the next farm.

Visiting this farm I found a very friendly, cheerful madame, who stated she had seen the men taking her rail; but, as it was an old one, they were welcome. She didn't like the gate-

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post-stump farmer, for he was a German sympathizer; so I ordered a cup of coffee and entered into conversation about our friend, and was very agreeably surprised to find that he had had no gate there for years, that he had already been paid a great many times for it during the war, and that his habit was to make a few fresh chips himself each evening. As troops came in each day and departed the next, no wonder he was willing to take seventy francs for his two-hundred franc gate.

It was lucky for him that the battalion had marched out before I got back, for a quiet, unofficial word to a few Diggers would have had him dumped into his foul-smelling manure hole. Perhaps we may return some day. As it was, I could only tell him that if ever he made a similar claim again he would be shot, and that the matter would be reported to the French Mission.

CHAPTER XX

"Up the Line"

AS we knew the Flemish would watch us march out we set off along the Poperinghe Road; then. when out of their sight, we turned sharply across a few fields and embussed. The 'buses started off towards Messines, but suddenly changed direction left and we soon found ourselves near Belgian Chateau, near

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Ypres, and going into the line in Polygon Wood. After a night's bivouac we left our packs, and as lightly as possible, albeit heavily, the next evening we started up the line.

At China Wall, so called because a wall had to be made for protection instead of trenches, the ground being so low and marshy, we had our tea while waiting for darkness. There was plenty to interest us.

Just behind us were rows of our own heavies —naval, ten and twelve-inch howitzers, and even heavier guns; and in front were thousands of our field guns—lighter howitzers and 18-pounders; all belching loudly and rapidly.

The long twilight seemed longer than ever as we sat there, especially when the enemy long-range guns began searching for the heavies behind us. A dead "Tommy" was carried past. Quite spontaneously every Australian stopped eating and stood to attention. We had nearly all seen hundreds of dead men before, but this "Tommy" was the first we had seen for three weeks. And he was a "Tommy."

Then we finished our tea, smoked, yarned and looked about. An enemy 'plane coming over squirting tracer-bullets at one of our observation balloons caused our "Archies" to bark—futilely, as usual—Lewis guns to rattle, and twelve balloons to be hauled down as hastily as possible. He was too quick for one, and set it on fire with tracer-bullets, and the two observers had to take to their parachutes.

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An old Digger told some new men that these balloons were often run by the Y.M.C.A. for airmen who wanted "fags" and cocoa without having to come down for them.

"Yes, this air-job is pretty risky," said another. "Last time we were in, two Fritz 'planes had engine trouble about ten-thousand feet up. Our guns wouldn't let their mates go to their help, and our 'planes couldn't get up that high; so the poor beggars died of cold and starvation."

I have often heard discussions as to whether shells can be seen going through the air. While waiting at China Wall this evening, a great many of us saw quite plainly a continuous stream of howitzer shells just at the point of their highest trajectory. They came into sight in the clear twilight sky at a tremendous height, rising slowly, then slower and slower until, at their culminating point, they seemed to rest; then they suddenly disappeared. We watched them—they were both our own and enemy—for about an hour. Where they were lobbing we knew not.

Within a small area in front of us were twenty of his Majesty's land ships, all wrecked and gradually sinking into the mud. One was in a crater forty feet deep and sixty feet across.

It is generally believed that coloured troops can't stand the big gun and shell fire. But here we watched for an hour dozens of West Indian blacks, not only preparing the shells and carry-

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ing them to the batteries, but showing their white teeth in broad grins as shells burst near them. They were as cool and steady as anyone could be.

As the word was passed along to get ready to move, a heavy enemy barrage came down in front of us, near Hell-fire Corner and Birr Cross Roads. I noticed M——, who had never been in the line before, was very frightened, although he tried hard to laugh at everything, and look unconcerned at the barrage on our track. The other new men looked as if they were brought up among guns, shells, mud, duckboards and barrages. It made one proud to be an Australian.

CHAPTER XXI

Hell-fire Corner

NOBODY knows who christened it, but everyone knows why. There could be no other name.

It lies at the intersection of some roads between Ypres and Westhoek Ridge. There is no metal left there now, as it has all been turned up and over, and up and over again, and mixed with the mud and slush. The road now consists of thousands upon thousands of long wide planks of timber, forming corduroys over shell holes, dead men, mules and horses; broken guns, ambulances, limbers and wagons. They run

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through this littered desolation. To get off them is to be bogged or upset into shell-holes; to remain on them is to court disaster, for they are under constant shell-fire. Everywhere nearby are evidences of terrific bombardments, as there is not even a square foot untorn by shells or bombs. Even the new corduroy roads have been hurled in fragments into the air, but the stolid pioneers keep the holes filled up and planked over where possible; or, if the hole is too big, they lead the track around it, using the splintered planks, limbers, wagons and guns for a foundation.

There were once cosy buildings here, according to our maps, but even the broken bricks and foundations have disappeared. There is nothing left now to show the former inhabitants where their homes were, for even the landscape has been torn about beyond recognition. Where children happily gathered the daily eggs, mademoiselle milked her cows, pigs grunted and squeaked, mother made the soup and omelettes, grandma her Belgian lace, father smoked his big Flemish pipe, and wooden clogs pattered along the brick paths, there is now nothing but churned ground and war debris. Trees that once grew around these homes have long ago been uprooted, and all traces of them buried beneath the corduroy tracks.

Fifty feet down a brigadier has his headquarters, and corps signallers their exchange. Water constantly drips on them, as they sit, lie

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or splash about; and but for shifts of thirty men constantly pumping they would soon be flooded out.

CHAPTER XXII

In Line in Polygon Wood

THAT hellish march in will never be forgotten by any of us. Hell-fire Corner barrage held us up. We rushed through it by sections, luckily with few casualties. Poor M—— was trembling violently.

"I can't go on!" he said to me.

"You will have to stick it now, old man. If you remain here you'll be knocked within a few seconds, and if you tried to go back you'd catch those shells going over us. The closer we get to Fritz now the better for us."

Then darkness came on—pitch-black night among millions of shell-holes full of water that had quickly oozed into them from the water-logged mud on all sides. We wound about, in and out among them, up and down with stumblings and jerks and swearings. Gruesome figures lay about—in the water and half out of the mud—Tommy and Scotty and Fritz in hundreds; broken wagons of all kinds, horses and mules, tanks and an aeroplane with its tail sticking up out of the black mud. There was not a star to guide us, nor tapes nor duckboards; only our magnificent runners.

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Touch had to be kept right throughout the battalion moving along in singe file. The barrage on Westhoek Ridge screamed and flopped down in the mud just as we reached it in the darkness. We had to go through it. Luckily the "Jack Johnsons" buried themselves deep in the mud before bursting, and gave us showers of soft clods instead of hurtling pieces of smashing iron. Touch was lost as each shell lobbed, and a few rushed ahead or back, or as the stretcher-bearers hastened backwards or forwards. (Regimental stretcher-bearers have, I believe, the most trying job in the war. They have all the hardships and risks of the infantry and none of the comforts—not that there are many— of the A.M.C. bearers.) Then a five-nine lobbed right into the platoon in front of me. As I reached the spot six Diggers were lifted out off the track by their mates. But we had to keep moving on. They would perhaps be buried during our period in the line when things quietened down a little.

Men were now guided more by the voices of their officers and N.C.O.'s than by anything else, for, except when an enemy flare went up in the distance we could not see beyond an arm's length ahead. Poor M—— again and again remarked "I can't stand any more of this." He would have had a nervous break-down before morning had he not jumped into a shell-hole for protection as a five-nine screamed. It lobbed in the same hole at the same time.

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Poor chap, he had been in camps for over two years before reaching France, but it was sickness and natural weakness that kept him there, for he had repeatedly tried to get across to do his bit. And he never saw a German. We hurriedly looked for a trace of him, hoping to find some keepsake for his people in Australia, though we knew how slight the chance of finding anything.

As we neared Battalion Headquarters in a German "pillbox," we struck another barrage. Stretcher-bearers were again busy. Our cooks were carrying on just outside the "pillbox."

Then we were told to follow wide white tapes into the front line. There were dozens of these tapes going in all directions and crossing and recrossing each other. An officer, half way down the company, lost touch with those in his front, and for half-an-hour we were lost. We went winding around shell-holes, holding on to each other's entrenching-tool handle. At last a runner met us. If I meet a dinkum runner in Australia after the war, I shall take off my hat to him.

As soon as we were at home in the trench the outgoing company marched out. Our patrols were before this well out in No-Man's-Land. All night long they kept coming in to report and going out again to watch and listen. Early the first morning, during a heavy fog, Joe Westwood's patrol surprised and captured a Prussian

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working party of ten. Great was their joy at being captured, and as they came towards us they were all smiles and delighted exclamations.

But their friends were evidently annoyed at their capture, for shortly afterwards, they commenced shelling us heavily. L—— sat in the bottom of the trench with his waterproof sheet in his hand, ducking under it every time a shell screamed near. The sheet would have been of little use had even a splinter come his way, but he was unable to prevent himself from burying his head in it every time. He is quite a delicate weed of a man and of a highly-strung temperament, one who should never have been passed as fit for active service. In some armies he would have been shot, but here everyone regarded him with the kindest sympathy, even his own section men who had to do his work; and all pretended not to notice his nervousness. No one spoke about it, except his officer to his O.C., who arranged to have him sent back on dump guard.

Then one of our own shells lobbed in our trench and decapitated Sgt. M—— of Manly, one of the most efficient and cheery N.C.O.'s in the battalion, and one who was about to get his commission. Had it not been a "dud," we should have had more casualties from it.

Enemy 'planes were cheeky until we brought down three of them with rifle and Lewis-gun fire, using armour-piercing bullets.

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On the 24th we were told that when the brigade advanced through us on the 26th and captured the remainder of Polygon Wood, we should have to dig a communication trench out to them. Straightway that night we commenced this C.T. and advanced it out into No-Man's-Land about two hundred wards. Some might call this "consummate Australian hide," digging a C.T. out towards a line we had not yet captured! While we were digging it a German patrol came along. We accounted for it by killing two and capturing two—49th Prussians.

CHAPTER XXIII

The 26th of September, 1917

THREE A.M. Have just come in off patrol. Everything Jacques.

The Intelligence Officers of the 4th Brigade have just finished laying out the tapes for the battalions to line up on shortly. They have been at it all night with covering parties out to protect them. The 14th, 15th and 16th Battalions are getting ready behind us to come up to these tapes. It is rather a difficult job fixing tapes in the dark as there are no landmarks to go by. Everywhere there are just trenches, shell-holes and barbed wire. The 16th Battalion is going through us first to take the first objective about eight-hundred yards out, and the 14th

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and 15th are to leap-frog them and take the final objective about twelve-hundred yards out. A runner has just handed me three Australian letters.

4 a.m.—They are beginning to get on to the tapes—great silent, shadowy masses of them. How big each man looks in the dark as he steps across the trench above us. Our patrols just in report everything normal. The artillery on both sides is normal, and enemy flares less active than usual.

28th September.—Just before daybreak on the 26th our wonderful barrage came down. It was "quite good enough to shave yourself by." It was indeed wonderfully accurate and a hundred times more tremendous than that of Gueudecourt. It cut a clean line just ahead of the tape stretching across our front on which the 16th were lined. Those who have not seen and heard a barrage like this can never imagine it. The turmoil of even the elements would be minute when compared with the belching of thousands upon thousands of big guns supported by a continuous hail from as many machine guns. The whizzings over our heads and the burstings just in front were more than awe-inspiring.

We watched the barrage in utter amazement —it was so much heavier and more accurate than we expected—ducking whenever a low shell whizzed over. Any such ducking would always have been too late if the shell was short. I think our C.S.M., "Curly" Harper, is about the only

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man I have never seen duck on these occasions.

This barrage went on for a few minutes. Then—

"Get ready, 16th!" was heard, and the Westralians stood up in a long line just behind where our shells were still churning the ground. It was grand.

Almost every man lighted a cigarette quite coolly—although many had never been under a barrage before, and none under one of such weight. The new men were already veterans, thanks to the influence of the old hands. The few minutes passed. The 14th and 15th, supposed to be two-hundred yards behind the 16th, were anxious, and had come close up.

"We won't wait for the —— barrage; we'll show it the way," I heard from a 14th man.

"What the hell are you in a hurry for?" asked an older soldier, "we'll get enough before we've finished."

"Oh, go and get your face camouflaged!" was the retort courteous.

Then the swish lifted, the line of dusty, churned ground, and hurtling lead and iron crept slowly forward, never a square foot of ground being missed. The advance was at the rate of twenty-five yards a minute, which seemed altogether too slow.

"Come on, 16th!" some officers called out.

"Here, help me over your trench, 13th," said one after another of those who had lined up behind a salient in our trench. And the whole

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line moved forward into the dust and smoke close behind the barrage. We watched them for a few minutes, then the line of the 14th and 15th went over us.

Soon, they too were lost to sight in the smoke and dust. Then the wounded began to trickle back, first walking cases, then stretcher cases. And as the smoke cleared away, many who had been dinkum Diggers a few minutes before, were seen lying out ahead of us in their last resting place. They were still—and always shall be—Dinkum Diggers.

Then a batch of bewildered, but pleased, prisoners came back without any escort. We rounded them up into stretcher-parties and made them carry back our wounded, a work they cheerfully did. Then a delirious wounded officer was carried back. He seized a rifle and attempted to shoot the prisoners, but was prevented.

"Kill them all, the blighters! They have killed my three brothers," he raved.

A Prussian Major and his orderly were the next. He looked ill-pleased with everything, and bore his immaculately-clad self very Prussian-like.

"You must not take my orderly for a stretcher-bearer," he said to me in perfect English.

"You're very lucky to be taken yourself," I replied as I searched him.

He had a box of cigars in his pocket. He took one out as I handed them back to him, and

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put it in his mouth. I struck a match and held it up while he puffed, expecting him to be a gentleman and offer me one—especially as I could have had the lot; but he insolently slammed the lid and put them back into his pocket. I felt rather annoyed, but recollected that he was what he was, and kept cool, ordering him to go back towards our rear, and detailing a man to escort him and to keep him from conversing with any other prisoners. Judge of my astonishment when he calmly looked at the man I had detailed, and said, "I demand an escort of equal rank!" We didn't have a Major with us, but it would have been all the same if we had.

"What does he want?" roared my O.C., Captain B——.

"An escort of equal rank!"

Captain B——, picking up a shovel, came at him most dangerous-looking; seeing which, and feeling, perhaps, that a knock on the head with such a weapon would be unbecoming his high and mighty self, he strutted across the trench and back with a Digger who would not have stood any more of his Prussian ill-breeding.

He didn't go far, for one of his own shells caught him direct and blew him to pieces.

The Digger came back smiling; he had been saved a long walk.

The smoke and dust clearing somewhat, we saw the 16th on their captured line consolidating, and, higher up on the ridge, the 14th and 15th, also in position and digging in.

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A batch of two-hundred prisoners now passed back, as well as many small groups here and there. We got five-hundred on our front.

Soon every man of the 13th was out carrying supplies to the new positions, bringing in the wounded, or completing the communication trench—or souveniring.

Then the enemy barrage came down on us and over us, and casualties grew quickly. A party of bearers carrying a wounded officer must have been caught and buried by this barrage, for no trace of the party has since been found, although the minutest search has been made.

Captain Bert Jacka, V.C., who was in charge of the 14th in their new line, seemed to be everywhere and to have a charmed life, for we could see him walking about among his men as they were digging in under the barrage.

CHAPTER XXIV

"NINE, KAMERAD!"

THREE Fritz prisoners came towards us alternately pulling up their trousers and raising their hands above their heads, crying in mournful voices: "Kamerad! Kamerad!"

They put me in mind of my schooldays when we were drilled at "Hands up!" "Hands on hips!" again and again.

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As we felt their pockets they most dismally exclaimed, "Nine, Kamerad, nine! Offizier souvenir!"

"Nine, Kamerad, Nine!"

"Where are your caps or hats?" we asked, touching their bare heads.

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"Nine, Kamerad, nine! Offizier souvenir!" they repeated, and their heads wagged as dismally as their voices sounded.

"Where are your belts?"

"Nine, Kamerad, nine! Offizier souvenir!"

"Where are your pay-books, compree salt-books?"

"Nine, Kamerad, nine! Offizier souvenir!"

"Where are your watches?" illustrating with our own, and speaking impatiently.

"Nine, Kamerad, nine! Offizier souvenir!"

We searched them again to get even a button or a shoulder-strap as a souvenir, but they mournfully continued "Nine, Kamerad, nine! Offizier souvenir!"

"What the hell have you got?" we asked disappointedly, but "Nine, Kamerad, nine! Offizier souvenir!" was the only reply we could get as they stood there still pulling up their trousers and raising their hands alternately.

Then Scotty Douglas had a brainwave. "I don't know what they're saying, but I know why we're getting no souvenirs. We are searching B Company's prisoners, and it's an axiom that if you find a Fritz with anything on at all, Captain Pollik of B is not in front of you."

So we moved over to the right and soon got all the souvenirs we could carry.

. . . . . .

The next time I heard "Nine, Kamerad!" was just after we captured a German trench.

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"How many more are down here?" I asked some bewildered prisoners, as I pointed down a deep dugout.

"Nine, Kamerad, nine!" they replied, mournfully shaking their heads.

I poked my head down at the entrance and called out "Herauskommen! Haende hoch!" which phrases, we had been told at the Divisional School, meant "Come out! Hands up!" but no one stirred.

I dropped down a Mills and stood clear. Still nothing stirred.

"Nine! did you say nine?" I brusquely demanded again of the prisoner party, and again they murmured "Nine, Kamerad, nine!"

So down I heaved another bomb, and when the dust disappeared, I grabbed a Fritz and made him go down before me.

"Now find your nine for me!" I ordered, but he still mournfully murmured "Nine, Kamerad, nine!"

I searched the dugout thoroughly and then came out in disgust. At the top I met my O.C. who roared "What the hell are you blowing these dugouts up for? We'll want them soon when Fritz opens out."

"Well, these Fritzes told me there were nine more Fritzes down there. and I couldn't get them up. There they are still shaking their heads and saying 'Nine, Kamerad, nine!' "

I could have fallen through the bottom of the trench as the Captain remarked:

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"They're talking *German*, not *English*, and *nine* is n-e-i-n and means *none*."

I then recalled the souveniring episode of the previous stunt.

CHAPTER XXV

The General Distributes Comforts

MIDDAY on Westhoek Ridge. We are a weary lot sitting in the sun trying to dry the mud off our clothes. Many are almost naked, "chatting" themselves and their clothes. The march out, if not as exciting, was more wearisome, than the march in. It seemed almost interminable as we plodded along round sheets of water formed by shell-holes meeting shell-holes. Quite mechanically we let our legs stumble on, our weariness preventing us from noticing anything. At length we reached here and threw ourselves down anywhere and anyhow to sleep.

The limbers can come up here now, for, since our capture of Polygon Wood, a corduroy road has been laid. As soon as I got out of my blanket about an hour ago I saw a sight that could only be seen in an Australian army.

There was the "Brig." (General Brand) surrounded by a hundred Diggers all grabbing towards him. He kept telling them not to push so much, but as he kept on handing out tins of

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salmon, sausages and fruit, bottles of sauce and acid drops, packets of biscuits, chewing-gum and chocolates and an occasional bottle of port wine, what could he expect?

I saw one man leaving the hustling crowd loaded up with tins of pineapple, Cambridge sausages, tomato sauce, port wine, salmon and biscuits. His mate had got a good "possie" near the Brig. and had passed them out. Another Digger got away with a case of port wine. A third got a case on to his shoulder, but putting it up so high, was spotted by the Brig., who called out to drop it as it was for the officers who had been in the line. Hearing this, I began to take a little notice and approached the crowd.

"Give a hand here, ——!" the Brig. called out. There he was in his old sheep-skin jerkin, surrounded by a stack of cases. One of his canteen men opened them with a bayonet while the Brig. handed them out.

"Here, leave those cases alone, they're for the 16th Battalion!" he called out to some 13th Diggers who wanted to assist the canteen man. The 16th won't get as much as they would have got had they been on the spot, and many of our Diggers are going to have a "blow out," especially those with the "buckshee" port wine.

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CHAPTER XXVI

CABLE-BURYING NEAR YPRES

AFTER being awakened nine times during the first night out from the line, by enemy bombs crashing into the camps near us, and pieces of "Archie" shells lobbing on our roof, I had just commenced dreaming we were back on the Riverina Plains when a runner flashed his torch into my eyes.

"Read it to me," I said to the runner, as my eyes were still trying to open themselves.

> "You will immediately take fifty men back to Ypres, reporting with them at 7 a.m. to the ——th Engineers for repair work, and remain with them until relieved—probably within three weeks."

I can't write what I said as I signed the order. Still less can I write what the sergeant-major said when I sent for him; and what the Diggers said when the S.M. roused them up with: "Get a wriggle on. Fritz has broken through the Third Divvy, and we've got to go and stop him," is beyond telling, let alone writing. We were a sleepy-looking, unshaved, shivering, muddy lot, as we moved off in the nipping five o'clock frost, back over the track we had come out along yesterday.

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"No bath after being in the line, no change of lousy shirts, no wash, no shave, no beer, no —— nothing! and back again!" a Digger, in as bad a humour as myself, grumbled.

They didn't get in any better humour when they heard we were going back to work for some "Tommy" Engineers. Whatever branch wants some rough, dangerous or dirty work done, the poor old Infantry is called upon to do it. The only people we haven't worked for are the Australian Pioneers, who, on the other hand, have often done infantry work.

If the A.S.C. or Artillery wants bomb-proof walls around their huts, stables or lines, we do it. Up here we were going to repair and bury cables broken by enemy shells to the east and south-east of Ypres. We had to keep at least six feet of earth on top of the cables.

Upon reporting at Belgian Chateau I received a long list of jobs to be done immediately.

"Where do we camp?" I asked.

"Anywhere near here."

I looked around over miles of dreary mud and sheets of water. It was raining heavily, too, as we were issued with twenty pieces of tent material, each about the size of a blanket. These were to be our sole protection from the rain. We selected the least muddy place available and dug down into it twenty oblong pits each about the size of two coffins, banking the earth dug out around these pits in sand-bags The covers were

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then stretched across to form roofs, and so we made our homes for the next three weeks.

Each day during this period we went forward through Ypres and out beyond Hell-fire Corner, Lake Zillebeke, Hooge and Westhoek. Each day we were over our knees for hours in mud; each day, for ten days, it rained heavily and continuously, and each day we walked for two hours each way to and from our broken cables.

Each night the men's feet were inspected, powdered with talc, and socks changed, while every third night they were washed in warm Condy's solution. Our brigade was very strict on this matter; consequently we had no trench feet.

Everyone looked forward each night to the rum issue, for we were a cold, damp crowd in cold, damp homes. Each night enemy 'planes bombed all around us, and pieces of shells fell into one or other of our "possies." The following extracts from my diary are typical of many during this period:

7th October, 1917, 9 p.m.—A cold, miserable, rainy day; raining all day long. Tremendous bombardments going on up near Passchendaele. Everywhere everyone is soaking wet. My men and self are mud from head to foot as we have been up beyond Hell-fire Corner and Lake Zillebeke burying cables. We were bogged again and again. I have wired for extra dry socks, singlets and boots for my party. We are always

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deep in mud from the moment we step out of our tents.

No one who has not seen Ypres can ever imagine the wreckage of beautiful buildings there. It is the worst I have seen for a city. Smaller towns, on the Somme and near Messines, have been utterly obliterated, and Albert is a large town in heart-breaking ruins; but for a city like Ypres, it is terrible!

8.45 p.m.—The Boche 'plane alarm is sounding—three long whistle blasts—all lights out. As I write in the dark the ground is trembling violently with the bomb-bursts. That one is close—must be in the mule lines near us. A nose cap from an "Archie" has just lobbed among the men. They have called out in reply to my question that there is no damage except a hole in their roof; they take it as a joke. They are singing "Mother Machree."

10 p.m.—'Planes gone. Seven Tommies and forty mules killed within 150 yards of us. Three bombs got right among them. Raining heavily; tent leaking; men singing "The Fourth Brigade are Happy." Now they are starting "The Bonnie Banks of Loch Lomond." One tent starts and the others join in. And there are "skunks" at home stabbing us in the back by striking against their Government while we are over here! I can understand people striking against private employers or companies, or against a Government that is not elected by the people—all power to them!—but against a

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Government where they have Universal Suffrage, and the widest in the world at that, and at this time! I am sure they cannot possibly appreciate the position. I am a unionist, and one of the founders of a union, and most of the men here are solid unionists. . . . Several of my men have dysentery—a rotten thing this rainy weather with our conveniences open to the sky.

9th October.—Still raining. Same kind of muddy work to-day. Sheets of water all around us and no sign of rain ceasing.

A light railway train—a Decauville—is puffing past my little tent. Wonderful what loads these toy lines carry! This engine—only eight feet long and five feet high, with a boiler I can cock my leg over—is now pushing over 150 tons of munitions, and there are hundreds of these little steam engines, as well as still smaller motor ones (about the size of railway trolleys) always going within a few miles of here. There are light lines everywhere behind the "heavies."

Our politicians in Australia will be missing a splendid opportunity if they don't get in early and buy a few of these light railway systems for patterns. They could easily be made in Australia and would open up the country for the heavier lines later on. How serviceable they would be between Cobar, C.S.A. mines and Gundabooka, from Canbelego to Nymagee, Carrathool or Griffith to Hillston, Swanhill to Balranald, Moama to Moulamein, and as feeders to the main lines. For passenger-travelling

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also they would certainly be surer and more comfortable than coaches.

Heavy guns are constantly firing somewhere or other, the nearer reports sharp and incisive, those far away like the tumbling about and rolling of big corrugated-iron water-tanks. A roll, another longer roll, a bump or two, a heavier bump, a roll and all over again and again! I think of several big tanks on springless wagons being hauled over a long badly-made corduroy road. This is always going on up here. Some of the guns over ten miles away shake the sandbag walls of my tent, while the naval 10-incher, about four-hundred yards away, shakes the floor quite violently.

Later.—Have just received a wire that we go into the line in three days' time for a stunt against Passchendaele.

CHAPTER XXVII

Reninghelst

WHEN I say we were in tents, don't imagine long, beautifully regular white lines on a gentle green slope. Anything but that! The reader by this time should know better. Sufficient it should be to say we were on the Western Front.

Like our guns and wagons, yes, and like ourselves—for our friends in Australia wouldn't have known us as we came out from Passchen-

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daele in October, 1917. Our tents were camouflaged; they were green, brown, yellow, red and any old colour all mixed up in any old way. Those not camouflaged in the regular way had shovelfuls of mud thrown over them to hide the white. And they were just dumped down anywhere.

The night we entered those at Reninghelst we noticed neither the muddy floors nor the great gaping tears in them. But before morning we had to notice things, for a terrific, sleety, North Sea wind storm came along, uprooted several, and tore others to rags. We were hurriedly marched into the houses in Reninghelst, where we should have been before, had not the British Army authorities followed out their usual plan of studying the convenience of our Allies before the comfort of their own troops, and so shoved us into tents while plenty of house and barn accommodation was available. There is a large church in Reninghelst in which a whole battalion could have been very comfortable, but, unlike the Germans, we never used a church for military purposes.

Here at Reninghelst we were a quiet lot, for there wasn't a voice left in the battalion, after the heavy gas at Zonnebeke. Everybody spoke in a whisper and the majority looked ill and haggard. I watched some parties playing cards, the players all watching the movement of each other's lips to read the bids. They were like mutes playing.

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Some played all night, for there wasn't much chance of enjoying a sleep with a 3 a.m. reveille coming. The next day we were off back to the Fruges Area, and so we did'nt mind marching five miles before we had our 5 a.m. breakfast near Vlamertinghe.

It was au revoir to Reninghelst, and that was good enough. Some of us were going to see old friends near Lisbourg; but we were a very different brigade to that which had left there six weeks before, for in the meantime we had fought Polygon Wood and Passchendaele and, while working in between, were never for a second out of easy shell-range. Can we ever be the same men as we were before we left Australia?. Will our friends expect it?

CHAPTER XXVIII

Where the Diggers were Known

WITHIN two days the men got rid of their weary look. Being so constantly in danger developed a look and a feeling of tension, although up there they always appeared careless and cheerful in spite of the continual strain of, perhaps subsconsciously, expecting a shell, bomb or bullet at any moment. Within two days they were quite cheery, wrote cheerful letters and generally improved all round.

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And the welcome our old friends gave us! Never can we forget it. They knew we were in the neighbouring villages and expected us to visit them the first Sunday, and, as far as possible, we didn't disappoint them. They wept when told why certain friends hadn't come.

What cooking they had done for us! They will remember us for our appetites if for nothing else. Three of us called on one old madame, aged eighty. She had prepared a pullet, French beer, home-made bread and butter for two Diggers who had been generous with cigarettes for her grandsons in the French army.

"Will they come this afternoon?" she asked.

"No, madame, they were both killed in Polygon Wood," I replied.

"Ah! and so young, so generous, so well-mannered! Ah! les sales Boches, les sales Boches! The good God will punish them . . . . si jeunes, si gentils!"

We left her in tears.

At W——'s billet (he was one of the three) there was another pullet, French cheese, beer and fruit. We delighted madame by over-eating, and when we said good-bye she insisted on filling our pockets with apples and walnuts.

My old madame—of the pyjamas and bath—had stewed one of her caged rabbits, which she could have sold for twelve francs, and made us sit down and eat two helpings of it, as well as some home-made bread, butter and jam. She

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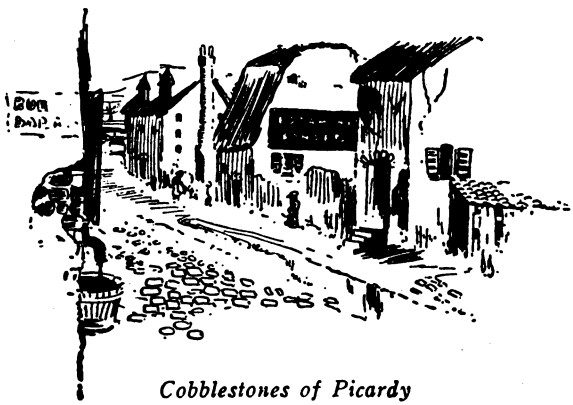
wanted to force an omelette on us too, but we finished with coffee.

The old couple next door, we were told, were also waiting for us. We hadn't been billeted there, but had given them cigarettes, etc., for their two sons—prisoners in Germany. We really had to eat a little and drink rum and coffee to please them. As they pressed a dozen pears on us they mentioned they would never forget my pyjamas that night my madame had invited them to see me in them.



Cobblestones of Picardy

Even the pigs welcomed us, for, while their owners were so occupied entertaining us, and watching us eat, the little cochons were able to run into bedrooms and under the table unmolested.

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A few days later while cycling through Canlers, out of our area, my bike broke down. As it was dark I knocked at a private house for a light. It happened to be an English officers' mess. They told me to go through to where the family lived and to be ready for a warm welcome, for the people were always extolling the Australians to them. Some Light Horse had been there over a year before.

As I entered the next room "Oh, un Australien! un Australien!" was repeated several times quite joyously. An enthusiastic reception indeed!

Madame Delozière immediately grabbed the frying-pan, and had me enjoying eggs, bread, butter, jam and coffee, before I had recovered from my reception. As I said good-bye, Madame and her two daughters embraced me and kissed me quite affectionately. Needless to say I reciprocated.

And the old French schoolmaster! He came from near St. Pol to visit us during his holidays. His relations had written him such glorious accounts of the "kind, thoughtful, helpful, generous, well-behaved Australians," that he determined to spend his holiday among us.

"And you are what is here written" (pointing to his letters) "and also you are so gallant soldiers, so tereeble to ze Germen!"

"Your Australia, it is near our New Caledonia, is it not? Please tell me all about it."

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So I gave him, and three poilus on leave, a lesson on our country. He had pictured Australia as teeming—in the good parts—with negroes, serpents, crocodiles, emus and kangaroos, and as nearly all desert. That we all spoke English surprised him. Portuguese were billeted in his town, and he expressed, as emphatically as only a Frenchman can, the utmost contempt for them, describing them as filthy and lazy, and a decided disadvantage as Allies, because they ate good food, occupied billets and annoyed the people, and yet did nothing to win the war.

CHAPTER XXIX

The 4th Division's Long March for a Three Months' Rest

AFTER a short stay in the Fruges and Lisbourg area we set out—full packs up—on the 16th November, 1917, and on the 24th we marched into the Gamaches area to settle down, until, perhaps, March, 1918. Perhaps!

The first night we were billeted near the village and famous field of Agincourt. Here is still, in a picturesque clump of trees along the roadside, the soldiers' cemetery. A monument, surmounted by a high crucifix, stands at he entrance, in memory of the French and English

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who fell on that great day of October, 1415. The cemetery is surrounded by a thick hedge. The battlefield is still as muddy as it then was.

Our next billets were at Wambercourt, near Fressin, famous for its church, which was ancient in the 16th century, when the Spaniards owned this country. Here the battalion was scattered along the village's one road, about four miles long. A most picturesque village, surrounded by hills covered with splendid timber, in the cleared spaces of which apples, wheat and tobacco grow abundantly. Several of us billeted at a miller's, gave the inhabitants a concert; the rushing water and the mill-wheel, which turned all the time, acting as accompaniment; the old miller in his flour-covered cap and clothes going out every now and again to attend to it.

Wambercourt feudal castle, although in ruins and overgrown with blackberries, is intensely interesting. It was battered and destroyed by Henry V of England after Agincourt, and the residents still point out the holes which they say were made by his cannon-balls. I wonder if the Tommies of those days ever dreamt of Diggers inspecting their work.

The fourth day brought us through Aubin-san-Vast with its big mill-wheels (how these people *use* their little rivers, and what a lesson to us!) to Tortefontaine. Here were German prisoners working in the fields without any guard. It could easily be seen that Australians had not

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been here before, for the schoolmaster's wife supplied dinner for five of us at three and a half francs. Quite a splendid meal, too, consisting of a 20-egg omelette, pork cutlets, mashed potatoes nicely browned, pears, apples, cider and coffee. But it was a village of quite another age, although it was within a day's march of many large, up-to-date towns. The schoolmaster had not seen the sea, and he didn't think anyone else in the village had, although it was less than thirty miles away.

That night I sat down at the kitchen table of my billet and began writing with my fountain-pen. Madame put a bottle of ink in front of me. I went on writing, not noticing it until she came over a few minutes later and took the cork out. I thanked her, said I had plenty in my pen, and continued writing. I began wondering why she watched me so intently for the next ten minutes. Her exclamation "Mon Dieu!" her crossing herself, and her call to her mother in the next room, were the first intimations I had that it was my *fountain pen* that had her marvelling.

When grandma arrived there was great excitement and quite a hubbub in a patois I could only partly follow. Madame explained that I had been writing twenty minutes without once dipping in the ink. Grandma suggested that it was a pencil I had and not a pen. I could hardly believe my ears and eyes as I looked at their bewildered faces. I went on writing. The use of blotting paper convinced grandma.

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"Oh, la-la! Mon Dieu! Monsieur! What is it, that pen you have there?"

"Une porte-plume, Madame," I replied.

"Comment, Monsieur?" she asked, incredulously.

"Une porte-plume (a fountain pen); it carries its own ink."

I must have seemed a wizard to these mediaeval people, for they both crossed themselves, and simultaneously yelled out "Jacques!"

Madame's husband came in from the barn. I went on writing to hear what he would say.

"Monsieur l'officier has been writing for over half an hour without dipping in the ink," he was informed.

He was incredulous, but not so expressive as the women. He simply queried:

"Comment, Monsieur?"

I took the pen to pieces and let them examine it. They were delighted when I let them fill it and use it a little.

"Une porte-plume!" muttered grandma," une porte-plume! Oh, lā-la!" and she sat down near the stove shaking her head at the wonderful thing that had come to pass.

. . . . . .

Fontaine-sur-Maye, against Crécy, was our next resting-place. Almost before we were dismissed, Diggers were all over the battlefield of 1346 where the Black Prince won his spurs. Three French children took me over the field and showed me all they could, and they were

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"What is it?"

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quite good guides. They told me that the English won, and that they were terrible people in those days. I examined the monument erected to the memory of the blind King of Bohemia, the ally of France, who was killed on the field; the date on the monument being 26th August, 1346. There was where his hat and "Ich Dien" plumes were picked up, and over there was where the Black Prince got into trouble. So the children told me. Then I stood on the mound on which stood the windmill from which Edward III watched the battle. The windmill itself stood there until the year of the Fashoda incident, when an ultra-patriotic Frenchman cut it down.

This field so soon after Agincourt! Imagine our feelings as we Diggers walked over it! The Forest of Crécy was near by, and the delightful old town with its monuments and beautiful church. Chinese of the British Army Labour Corps, in their quaint "get-ups" strolled about the town, or cut timber in Crécy Forest for war purposes. A big Sucrerie was making sugar from beet grown on the battlefield.

. . . . . .

Still we had to move on, and next afternoon found us crowded into the stables of a farm at Hautvillers. I had just seen each company into its place when the farmer came excitedly calling out for me. He wanted a guard to be put on to watch over about fifteen tons of apples he had in heaps about his orchard. I placed a guard of

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ten men. Shortly afterwards, he again came calling after me, and asked me to take the guard away as they were eating more apples than the rest of the battalion had.

I went to a room of his house occupied by "C" and "D" Company officers, and found them all eating apples as fast as they could take them from a two-ton heap just under their window. Afraid that the farmer would see the cores, they got me to buy five francs' worth as a bluff, by which they ate twenty francs' worth and carried as many away with them the next day. He was a very wealthy farmer, and charged us 7s. to 9s. a dozen for eggs.

The seventh day we marched into our "rest area" between Abbeville and Dieppe. To get here from Passchendaele we had marched ten miles, trained forty, 'bussed thirty, and then, after a rest, had marched for a week. But we forgot all that as we "dug in," arranged for halls, bought turkeys and hired crockery for our Christmas dinner. The Brig.'s Dinkum Oil was good.

CHAPTER XXX

The British Army Hay-stacks

OUR billets had stone or wooden floors. True, we had three blankets each, and we cuddled up together in twos, threes and fours. But still the floors were hard and cold. The Diggers needed straw to lie upon and they

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had to have it. Regimental funds failed to provide it, for the farmers would not sell it at any price until they had threshed the wheat out of it, a job they reserved for days when field work was impossible.

As battalion interpreter ("Interrupter," according to my friends) with Major Murray, our second-in-command, I visited every place in the district, not only to look for straw, but to get places for baths and stables. The Maire, a very important, stout, old gent, refused to believe Murray was a major and acting C.O. of the battalion, but took him for a sergeant. When enlightened he was astonished, and full of unwanted apologies, saying that an English sergeant-major once billeted there had far more shiny buttons, stripes and badges than Murray, who was dressed like a Digger, except for the dark crown on each shoulder, a Sam Browne, and his V.C., D.S.O. (bar) and D.C.M. ribbons. The Maire's idea of rank was the amount of shine, colour and gold braid.

The Maire sent me to the small farmers to demand both straw and stables; the small farmers strenuously objected to having to supply the whole, while the Maire and his friends, all big farmers, supplied nothing at all. We obtained neither sufficient water nor straw.

I then visited a British Army hay dump—several stacks of thousands of tons—bought by our supply heads and guarded by Tommies, and reconnoitred how we could get to them by night

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to steal enough for our beds. Yarning with the guard, I found out the sergeant's movements. He generally went to his billet in town at 8 p.m. Battalion Headquarters supplied me with a bottle of whisky, and with this—after a few unofficial hints to the men about the best way to raid the dump—I approached the stacks at 8.30 p.m.

"Halt! Who goes there?" demanded the sentry.

"An Australian officer," I replied. "Where can I find your officer?" I knew he was billeted in Gamache, fifteen miles away.

"He won't be here till come Monday, sir."

"That's hard luck for him as I've got a bottle of whisky to keep him warm these cold nights."

"Sorry, sir!"

We spoke about the cold, the sergeant, the wind, and Blighty for a few minutes.

"Well, I'm not going to carry this back. I'll give it to your mates in the hut," I said.

They were playing cards for issue cigarettes. Their eyes sparkled when I presented them with the whisky. They thought they would have a drop straight away, and on my suggestion the lance-corporal invited their mate, the sentry, in.

Soon we were yarning about Devon and Somerset, the sentry, to whom I paid most attention, taking some considerable time to tell me all about Exeter. . . .

When I repassed the stacks, about an hour later, I noticed that one, at least, appeared shorter. It might have been imagination, but

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two-hundred Diggers armed with string and rope, *can* move a lot of hay in an hour. I was afraid their tracks would be seen by pieces of

Yarning about Devon and Somerset

straw lying about, but they had been too careful for that. They had done the job well, and had left the two raided stacks tidy, albeit shorter.. That hay wasn't missed by the British Army.

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But if the Tommies trusted us, our own A.S.C. staff came to regard us with suspicion, for after one of our sergeants visited and sang a few songs to them the other evening, they missed a bag of potatoes.

CHAPTER XXXI

Up Cambrai Way

IT was on the 24th of November, 1917, that we finished our long trek back from Belgium to the Gamache area. It was the 29th before we "borrowed" straw to sleep on. On the 2nd December, just when we were settled down comfortably—it always took a week to get things in order; lavatories, latrines, training and footballs grounds, horse lines, and a hundred other things having to be made early—we handed in our canteen orders for our Christmas dinners.

On the 3rd we received orders to get ready to move off at a few hours' notice to an unknown destination.

No wonder the men were so keenly disappointed, for hadn't this "dinkum rest" been promised them ever so long. Since arriving in France the 4th Division had not had a clear month's rest. We had to our credit, since the Somme Push started in 1916, Pozières, Mouquet Farm, Flers, Stormy Trench, Bapaume, Bullecourt, Messines, Gapaard, Polygon Wood and Passchendaele, to say nothing of long periods of

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heavy digging and carrying on the Somme and around Ypres and Messines. All in little over a year, and each action meant weeks of slogging preparatory work. No wonder men with excellent records suddenly began soiling crime-sheets; no wonder they broke up occasionally; and no wonder they blamed—unreasonably, no doubt—the "Brig.," Gen. MacLagan, Birdwood, and even "Billy" Hughes; and accused the heads of ribbon-hunting. Perhaps they were right in feeling that a determined stand by our commanding officers would have got them the rest they deserved.

They said that, like the Guards, we were shock troops; but that, unlike the Guards, who did truly wonderful things in the war, we were not taken out after successful fighting, but kept in near the line on wearisome fatigues.

In spite of their disappointment, however, they were extremely jocular over it; and Fritz, could he have met them, would have found them even more dangerous than usual. No wonder the "Blighty" people don't understand our men. No one does.

The 6th December found us at Moislains, between Peronne and the Hindenburg Line. We had been sent up to help stop the big German advance that came as a shock after Byng's successful Cambrai Push.

Detraining at Peronne at 10 p.m., after a frigid train journey, we marched along frozen roads until 2 a.m., slipping and stumbling all the

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way. Mules and horses especially had a bad time, many being severely hurt by slipping. A man near me, on his third heavy fall, caused much amusement by exclaiming, with great vehemence, just as he struck the ground, "Blast Billy Hughes!" He had evidently been in deep thought just as he fell.

As we left Peronne a big, black, smellful billy-goat joined us, and insisted on marching at the head of a company. We couldn't drive him away, so we still have him perfuming the cook's quarters. I won't be surprised to hear any day that he has been turned into fresh meat. He is believed to be the mascot of a Welsh regiment cut to pieces in Fritz's push.

So here we are up against the line again, away from any place of comfort or recreation, within sound of the guns, and in a bombed area, right among desolated snow-covered fields, and ready to be sent into the trenches any moment for Christmas and New Year.

To-day we had the Referendum Proclamation read to us, and to-morrow we vote for or against conscription. Had we still been enjoying our rest, I believe there would have been a big "Yes" majority in this Division; but under the present conditions—such an antithesis—a big "No" vote is certain. Still there is not one here who wants this job imperfectly finished, or one who has any time for non-fighting pacifists. The Diggers are all practical pacifists, recognizing that the Peace we want can only come after beating Fritz.

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CHAPTER XXXII

Nearer the Hindenburg Line

TO-DAY is New Year's Day, 1918. We are in tents on top of a bleak hill overlooking Templeaux-la-Fosse, a few miles nearer to the line than Moislains. All day we have been amusing ourselves by tobogganing down the hillsides and collecting wood for our braziers. This morning the officers visited their company tents to wish their men the compliments of the season. The spirit was there, but we know we shall be carrying picks and shovels along the road before daybreak to-morrow morning, and every morning while here, as we have been doing for almost a month, to dig reserve lines behind the Tommies near Gauche Wood and Villers Guislain, returning after dark.

We spent the Christmas in these same tents, and, as for to-day, our rations were well added to by purchases from regimental funds and gifts from Australian Comforts. Moreover, our "Blue Dandies" were showing the pantomime, "Cinderella," quite well-staged indeed; and most of us, in addition to "Sing-songs" in our tents, visited them.

Had the Hun not been such a brute we should feel the cold here very much more than we do.

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Before he retreated from these parts, he destroyed every tree and vine in the orchards and vineyards, leaving us plenty of dry wood which, otherwise, we should not be allowed to take.

The day we arrived here we thought our tents were going to be more comfortable than tents generally are, for Major Murray discovered a haystack about two miles away from any camp. It must have been ten years old, and had been in the Germans' possession for over two years; so we felt it was good salvage. Accordingly we soon lined our tents nicely with it. But we seemed doomed to come "Annettes." A Division Staff-officer saw us carrying it, and hardly had we thrown ourselves down to lie upon it to see how soft it was, when we were ordered to regather it, carry it back the two miles, and remake the stack. The general opinion was that our Divisional Headquarters were afraid of criticism from the "Tommy" Generals to whom we are now attached. We are just one Australian Division in a "Tommy" Army, and since coming here we have learnt to appreciate our own Australian Corps the more, not only for better rationing, but for better management, and a better understanding all round.

Our officers, who have to visit the front line regularly, have all been surprised at finding British and Germans working peacefully within full view of each other. Near Gauche Wood each night opposing covering parties lie down in the snow within one-hundred yards of each

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other, while wiring parties work behind them. It is a case of "Leave Fritz alone while he's quiet." Quite contrary to our idea of strafing him on every possible opportunity. Our brigade is never raided, simply because we make Fritz keep his head down and so see nothing.

In the King's Own Scottish Borderers in Gauche Wood front line, every man looks as spick and span as if on parade in London. They shave and shine up their boots and buttons every day. As we passed along we were continuously saluted, so that we were glad to reach the South African Scottish, where our arms got a rest. The K.O.S.B. officers were very glum over their Christmas whisky. Their mess-cart, returning from Peronne with several cases, drove into the German lines in broad daylight, while the Scotties could do nothing but watch it go. Lucky Fritzes!

CHAPTER XXXIII

Back to Ypres Salient again

FROM near Cambrai to Canada Corner, in Belgium, is a long way, but on the 11th January, after two full-pack marches, and about sixteen hours in a train, we there rejoined our own Corps, ready, without a day's rest, to go into the line again in the Ypres salient.

This time we were sent in to hold a line of

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trenches and outposts on both sides of the Ypres-Comines Canal; and, when not right in the front line we dug, wired, salvaged and carried, round about Spoil-bank, Hill 60, White Chateau and Hollebeke.

The Germans having shown signs of preparing a big attack, we came in for a great deal of patrol work. Our patrols soon made No-Man's-Land absolutely ours. The enemy was very strong on our front in plenty of strong "pill-boxes" behind wide belts of swamp and wire; consequently our specially-chosen party of forty raiders didn't get the opportunity they wanted to "hop over," but were put on patrol work instead. Being anxious to know what German regiment was in front of us, each patrol tried hard night after night to get an identification; fourteen days' special leave having been promised for a German, dead or alive. An outpost reported having shot several in a fog one morning, but they were unable to find a body. It came to a patrol to find one. They brought back his pay-book, disc and papers, showing that he belonged to the 93rd, a crack German regiment; a good thing to know. Among his papers was his photo, taken fraternizing with a group of Russians, thus proving that his regiment had recently come across from the Russian Front.

Although we were in the line, or close up to it, from the 20th January to the 1st March, so well had all taken care of their health, that we had not a single case of trench feet. This speaks

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volumes for the men's determination to keep themselves fit, and for our officers' conscientious attention to their commands. Socks were changed daily and feet "talc'd" regularly.

As we were with our own Corps, our food was good, and reached even the outposts quite too hot for immediate swallowing. The front line and posts received hot stew or curry at 7 p.m., hot soup or cocoa at midnight; bacon, bread, jam, cheese and rum at 6 a.m.. The supports received their meals at 5 p.m., 11 p.m. and 7 a.m., and, in addition, hot tea at 11 a.m. So our ration parties had plenty to do.

The Australian Comforts gave our battalion twenty cases of cocoa and milk, which made a welcome addition to the rations, and enabled us to supply all working parties with a hot nourishing drink at any hour of the night. And the Y.M.C.A. had a cocoa "shack" quite close up to the front in Oak Avenue. As each man returned to White Chateau from his carrying or wiring, he appreciated thoroughly, and lauded eloquently, the work of our women-folk for us. As he received his mug of cocoa he dipped his hand into a box of biscuits "From the Loyal Women of South Australia to the Fighting Men," and as he changed his socks for new well-knitted ones he read notes he found in them from any part of Australia. It helped him to forget that he had just been out for six hours carrying heavy loads of barbed wire across bullet and shell-swept swamps while the pitiless rain pelted in his face.

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During this period everyone seemed to have been bitten by a "Salvage Microbe." Neither man nor officer returned from the line empty handed, but all carried something like a muddy, rusty rifle, a bandolier, a piece of a Lewis gun, or even a rum-jar. No vehicle returned from Oak Dump or Spoil-bank to the transport lines without a load of salvage—old rifles, shell-cases, tank-parts, gun-wheels, bags of paper or socks, etc., etc. Everywhere one ran up against notices like these: "Where's *your* bit of salvage?" "*Anything* is useful, don't let it sink under the mud!" Thanks, drop it here!"

Some of these notices were most amusingly illustrated, too. There was one—a Scotty, about six stone weight, carrying an equipment which weighed him down and practically hid him, looking at a tank and wondering where he could carry it. One of our officers, anxious for the battalion to distinguish itself by getting a record list of salvage, one day rounded up at Headquarters every spare runner, batman and signaller he could find and forthwith led them out salvaging. A few hours later the Colonel angrily rang me up. Here is a translation of what he said:

"Didn't you tell me you had placed 48,000 rounds of S.A.A. in those strong posts?"

"Yes, sir; I saw them there myself this morning."

"What the hell's happened to them then?"

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I guessed they'd been salvaged and asked: "Has C—— been out salvaging to-day?"

He dropped the 'phone, and I imagined C——'s interview with him.

The 48,000 rounds had been carried back over a mile, and we had to take them back again to the strong posts.

Some angry Engineers also soon after got on to our Adjutant. Their dump, that had just reached them after a week's delay, had also been salvaged and sent back.

After ten days in the outposts we changed over with the support battalion, and occupied the crater and canal tunnels on the east of the canal. My diary entry for 5th February, reads:

"In Crater Tunnels. Still going well and strong, although I haven't had a change of clothes, except socks, for over three weeks; in fact, haven't been undressed since 19th January. I have walked miles and miles underground in these tunnels, repeatedly bumping my tin hat against the roofs. The Canadian Tunnellers constructed these underground labyrinths. One acquires a stooping walk living in here. We have electric lights throughout, and decent—but hard—bunks. We are in many parts ankle-deep in water which is constantly dripping from the roofs, and but for electric pumping day and night we should be flooded out. But still we can rest here as we are free from shells and gas.

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"Several thousand men living—cooking, sleeping, etc.—underground require some tunnels. Many have husky and irritable throats from gas breathed in while on fatigues. Fritz has been constantly sending over gas shells lately on our left, but they have been practically wasted—good luck. We bluff him a lot and he pours shells into faked positions, blowing them to pieces and smothering them in gas day after day. I suppose he does the same with us.

"One of our companies in Canal Tunnels is having an uncomfortable sloppy time, for these tunnels have neither electric lights, ventilators nor pumps.

"The 14th Battalion just against us, has suffered severely during the week from gas, about one hundred being evacuated. We have had twenty gas evacuations, and a great deal of stomach illness this week."

Then, after a few days out near Locre to enable us to get a clean up, bathe and change, in we came again. The "Brass Hats" all seemed to expect a big German attack, and so we were kept patrolling more than ever. Things were certainly livelier; his machines guns seemed to have multiplied, his "pineapples" and "flying pigs" pelted the outposts, his "five-nines" smashed up our dumps and duckboards each day, his long-range guns got on to our back areas, and his airmen became cheeky again. One of his 'planes crashed down, after a fight high up, among our Diggers working near White

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Chateau. It and its occupants were quickly "souvenired."

A few hours later a Yank airman motored up to Spoilbank and walked across to where the 'plane had fallen to get a souvenir. It was, he said, his 'plane, as he had brought it down, and

as it was his first Fritz he was anxious to have something to remind him of it later on in the States. But there was absolutely nothing left for him to souvenir.

"Wal, you chaps are some rapid, no error!" he remarked, somewhat sorely. "I guess the next Barche I bring down I'll souvenir him up above."

Finding he was willing to give a few dollars for something to remind him, a couple of

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Diggers near a dump of salvaged German ammunition quickly brought him a handful of "the poor blighter's bullets."

CHAPTER XXXIV

4TH BRIGADE'S LAST DAY IN YPRES' SALIENT

IT was the 1st March, 1918. As it was the day on which we said good-bye to the salient for good, I shall let my diary talk:

1 a.m. In Battalion Headquarters, "Bow Dug-outs." All bustle as we expect a big German attack on our left, and believe we shall come in for some of it. Raining heavily all night. I have just come in from seeing to the placing of S.A.A. and bombs in the strong posts. I had previously done so, but Lt. C—— "salvaged" them. Fritz will get a hot time if he includes this part in his attack. A prisoner captured by the English on our left gave the information concerning the attack, and this has been supported by aeroplane photos and telephone messages caught by our listening sets. One of our signallers catches messages from Eiffel Tower regularly, so we get the latest news even when we can't get the *Daily Mail.*

5 a.m. "Standing-to" at present; the usual procedure every morning lately. The reserve battalions are near our support lines, having marched up between 2 and 4 a.m. from their camps. They have marched up here every

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morning lately. The men are sheltering themselves as well as they can from the rain, and telling yarns. The best so far is stated to be a true one about a recent visit to the Hollebeke area by General Birdwood, accompanied by Colonel Durrant. Passing two men mending duckboards, "Birdie," as usual, spoke to them.

"Good day, my man!"

"Good day, sir!"

"Good day, my man!"

"Good day, sir!"

"Everything all right?"

"Not too bad, sir," replied the first, while the second ventured:

"We must be winning, sir."

"Oh, yes, my man, we are; and I'm very pleased to hear you say so. But what specially makes you say so?"

"Thirteen to a loaf last night, sir, and eighteen to a tin of jam!"

"Well, I *am* pleased to hear that. I'm glad the rations are getting forward so well in spite of the shelling," Birdie continued in his quick peculiar way of speaking. "Good day, my men!"

"Good day, sir!"

The Diggers regarded each other for a few seconds, with looks that said more than words; then, as "Birdie" wound along the duckboards, he heard No. 1 Digger remark to his cobber:

"You came a gutser, Tom."

"My ——— oath!" replied Tom, slowly and emphatically.

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"What does he mean by that?" said "Birdie" to the Colonel.

The Colonel explained that the issue of bread should be two or three men to a loaf, and that the jam issue should be a tin to six men.

"And that man didn't mean what he said?" queried the General in astonishment.

As they continued along the track the General remarked to himself several times: "I must go into these little details."

7 p.m.—The 3rd Brigade are coming in. I am leaving here shortly to go back to Tournai Camp to arrange a hot meal for our troops being relieved to-night.

9 a.m. In Tournai Camp.—The men are dribbling in by twos and threes, and receiving a hot meal upon arrival. They report having come through heavy shelling. At present we are barraging the enemy very heavily with big stuff. The discharges are tremendous and shake the huts violently. The 14-incher near by puts out our candles. Enemy "heavies" are searching for it, and are "crumping" near here frequently. Our men coming back now must be having a nervy time, also the 3rd Brigade just in.

The firing has increased to an S.O.S. pitch. I am trying to hear our 18-pounders, but the bigger guns are drowning them completely. There must also be a big machine gun barrage on, but I cannot hear it; a rough finish for us.

10 p.m.—The barrage is still of S.O.S. intensity. I heard our machine guns rattling out

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just now during a momentary lull. A few of our men just in seemed "rattled." Several casualties reported. The German barrage is reported to be of exceptional intensity. They are perhaps attacking, or preparing to.

2nd March, 1 a.m. Tournai Camp.—Poor Luscombe has gone; a splendid young officer. Capt. "Humph" Browning is about "out" too, dangerously wounded in the kidneys. Many men have gone West. Hard luck just after being relieved.

The bombardment has died down a great deal, but still the firing is abnormal. The Germans raided the Outpost Headquarters just after the 10th Battalion had taken over, and while our men were on their way out. They opened the raid with a hurricane of "minnies" and machine guns, and then brought down a 4.2 and 5.9 barrage on our supports, communications and rear. Our "C" Company caught the barrage in the communication trench, and had five killed and six wounded. Fritz captured the Company Commander of the 10th, and our Capt. Browning, who had waited to talk matters over with him. Our Lewis guns got on to the retreating Boche and their few prisoners and practically wiped them all out, the 10th Major being among the killed, and Capt. Browning among the wounded.

6 a.m.—A party has just been detailed to go back and bury those killed last night. We are moving back to Neuve Eglise.

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CHAPTER XXXV

Rubber Heels

THEY slipped over and exploded against us without any warning. As they passed over our heads to sneak, unheard by their victims, on to other camps and towns, we heard them wailing and screaming dismally and shrilly. They were fired from near Lille into Bailleul, Neuve Eglise, Dranoutre, Locre, Meteren, and even Hazebrouck, which meant a range of over twenty miles. All night long they wailed and screamed over us at Neuve Eglise, dropping here, there and everywhere.

When we could hear them we knew we were safe. The first one we didn't hear until it exploded, came right into us at Neuve Eglise on the 22nd March, our Battalion Sports Day. Our tug-of-war teams, the twelve strongest men in the battalion, were on their rope practising when it lobbed thirty-five yards short of them in a muddy field. We buried six of them that evening, and of the remainder not one is likely ever to return to us, so frightful are their wounds. And this shell was one of our own, given to the Germans by the Russians. Our "rubber heels" are as deadly as any of his.

Then came orders to move immediately to

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Vauxhall. The whole battalion packed up and was on the march within thirty minutes. Here we remained ready to move immediately, anywhere. "Rubber heels" still wailed and screamed over us, or suddenly exploded short of us. While waiting we played the final Rugby match for the Brigade Cup. It was strenuous and exciting. As we won, the officers shouted champagne and beer to the team; the usual custom. Each player received the cup full of champagne. It had then to be packed up and sent away, for the news from the 5th Army and the adjoining French, was still bad, and we couldn't carry cups with us.

Our last night in Belgium, "rubber heels" passed over in greater numbers than before, one lobbing on a motor-cyclist just beyond us.

CHAPTER XXXVI

Back towards the Somme

THIS morning—25th March—we had réveillé at 4, up in Belgium; to-night, we are down between Arras and Doullens.

Embussing near the Belgian border, we hurriedly passed through Steenwerke, Merville, Lillers and St. Pol, and debussed at La Herlière. The 4th Brigade remained near here, the rest of the 4th Division going farther down towards

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Albert and Dernancourt. St. Pol has been badly bombed, and this place shelled this week.

There are remnants of many "Tommy" battalions near here, most of them without any idea of where they are or to where they should report, and knowing nothing except that "Jerry's coming strong."

These remnants of the 5th Army have been passing back all night. It is now midnight, and I can still hear them trudging along.

This morning we were part of Plumer's Army; now I believe we belong to Byng or Rawlinson.

It was a wonderful piece of work moving the whole Australian Corps from seventy to one-hundred miles in a day. The people of Steenwerke were up early, and out in their narrow, picturesque streets, to wave us along. Many a Digger had a friend here, and as recognition took place there were delighted exclamations and waves on both sides.

"Au revoir, bonne santé, monsieur!" "Bon retour!" "Bonne fortune!" were heard repeatedly. I heard one Digger call out "Au revoir, Mamselle Yvonne, me retourner toute suite!" Whether he will or not?

Passing through Barly, as far as I could see in every direction, there were long columns of motor lorries spinning southwards in longer columns of dust. We were all a dusty lot indeed.

Here I saw several families unloading their furniture. Thinking they were évacué's from

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the Bapaume area, I asked an old monsieur and his wife why they were stopping here instead of going back farther, and so making sure of being safe. But they were not évacués—not yet. They may be if we are driven back. They were about to be évacués when the head of our

Disturbing rumours

column appeared "Ah, monsieur, vous êtes Australiens, très bons soldats; vour les tiendrez," he replied, and madame and her children repeated "Les Australiens très bons soldats!" as they went on with the unloading and carrying back of their furniture.

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At the next village, Bavincourt, we found the same thing going on, the people unloading the vehicles they had just finished loading. Yet, the Australians had never been in this area before.

Every hour this evening we have received disturbing rumours—the Germans are against Paris; Plumer's Army is in retreat; the German cavalry and tanks are within a mile of us. But we intend to make ourselves as comfortable as possible, for to-night at any rate.

CHAPTER XXXVII

Through Gough's Broken Army

MARCH 26th, 5 p.m. Lying out on a ridge west of Hébuterne. We were up early this morning, ready to move any minute. Everything that could not be carried easily on our persons was sent to the Q.M. to mind. The Tommies were still straggling back at daybreak. At midday they were still coming, substantiating the rumours that hundreds of German tanks were just behind them. At a hurried meeting we discussed how we should deal with these tanks, the best thing we could arrive at being to pour rifle and Lewis-gun fire into them, aiming especially at any crack or opening.

Then we began our advance through the retreating army. A small car dashed along, scattering the Tommies, Jocks and Taffies. It

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had seats for three, but I counted nine Staff Officers, including two Generals, on it. They were all over it. No wonder their men felt they were beaten. Some Diggers couldn't help being sarcastic and greeted this car-load with "Don't you know there's a war on?" "You're going the wrong way to find Fritz," and similar remarks.

Just after midday we saw weird-looking things in the distance, smoking furiously and advancing slowly but surely towards us.

"There they are! They're the tanks!" we were told repeatedly; but still we advanced in column of fours. They certainly had us thinking.

Then we saw that the "tank" crews were all on top of their "tanks," and decided we could easily pick them off. We felt confident that we could deal with these tanks, or whatever they were. I shall never forget the general roar there was when we discovered them to be twenty French motor-tractor-ploughs, driven by French soldiers who had been ploughing near Bapaume.

On this ridge we have marked out a trench system to hold on to in case of attack. Several 5th Army Officers have assured us that Hébuterne is strongly occupied by the enemy; and our job is to recapture it at daybreak to-morrow morning.

6 p.m.—General Brand didn't believe that Hébuterne was occupied, and rode into and through the town without seeing a German. He

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hurried back and has just ordered us to move straight into it. We have no artillery at all to support us.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

We Meet Fritz

LUCKY Brig. to be still with us! It so happened that when he rode through Hébuterne the advanced German party of seventeen was there, but they were either "windy" or drunk. There were also two Welsh officers drunk in the town when we arrived that night.

Entering Hébuterne we were less fortunate than our General, for we had a very hot time and suffered heavy losses before we cleared the town at the point of the bayonet in the darkness. The enemy was not in great numbers. It was a pitch-black night, and so intensely interesting, prodding the bayonets into dark rooms and corners. Lights were too dangerous to think of, and even Fritz seemed to have got ahead of his flares. Their rifle and machine-gun fire was severe, and laid low many of our friends. But still the others advanced until they emerged from the other side of the town. The Hun now made a stubborn stand in the cemetery, using the vaults as cover, and it took two nights for us to dislodge him.

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In searching for hidden Huns on the night we captured the town, a Digger stumbled into a deep, stinking well. We rushed to his assistance, thinking he was scuffling with a Fritz. We couldn't reach him, no rope was handy, and he was about done. A tall chap instantly went down on his stomach and called out: "Catch me by the feet and hold me down!" Two grabbed each foot, and others held on to them. His head disappeared down the well and we waited anxiously, for the sides began to fall in. Luckily he was just long enough, for the freezing, drowning man to seize his hands. The strain on the volunteer human-rope must have been tremendous, for we, hanging on to his legs, felt it. We hurried the rescued man back to the doctor in a very bad way.

I can't find anyone who remembers who the tall Digger was. His deed was one of the most heroic imaginable. But unknown heroes are common in any Digger battalion.

Early next morning enemy airmen machine-gunned us vigorously, and in the afternoon a big attack was prepared against us.

While his artillery was ranging, I received an order to go and find a Frenchman reported to be in the town and to send him back, for we could take no risk with possible spies. I found him, an old man of sixty, in his poor old home, right near our front line. His wife and daughter had gone the day before, as the first Huns came in sight. I remembered seeing them dragging

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and pushing a handcart loaded with their belongings—a mattress, a few blankets, clock, two chairs, kitchen utensils, a small safe, and two wooden tubs—all tied on a cart no bigger than

some of those that Australian boys love to play with. The mother pulled, the daughter pushed, both dressed in their Sunday best clothes as the easiest way to carry them. In addition to pushing, the daughter led a cow. I shall never forget them, and hundreds of others, hurrying along the road to Bienvillers, mixed up with Tommies, Taffies and Jocks.

The old man had remained behind to look after the house and pig. There he was, tying up a few articles and carrying them up into the attic for safety, and Boche shells screaming over into the town. When he understood he had to leave at once, his eyes welled up, and a tear

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dropped down each cheek, as he replied: "Ah, monsieur, our beautiful things," pointing to a room of furniture that wouldn't bring £5 for the lot in Australia, "our chickens and our pig!" As he said this, a shell lobbed near-by and carried away a wall of his home. A couple of Diggers escorted him back towards Foncquevillers, each carrying a load for him. What he did when they left him, goodness knows.

We ate his pig and poultry next day, as well as many others later on, to save them starving or being killed by shells; for soon the town was no longer a town; the homely homes, homes no longer. We set dozens of canaries and rabbits free, but they refused the offered liberty; the canaries returning to their cages to starve; the rabbits running to us to be nursed.

Then we had to "stand-to," for, under cover of heavy smoke, the enemy massed in a valley in front of us, and his barrage came down on us. Hour after hour that afternoon he poured it into us; every minute a few attempted to rush a trench a hundreds yards out; but our rifles and Lewis guns were splendidly active, and accounted for so many that the attack was dropped. We ourselves couldn't get into this trench, for the space between us and it was enfiladed from the cemetery. During this day alone, my company lost two officers, the C.S.M., three signallers and thirty other N.C.O.'s and men.

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That night we captured the cemetery, which annoyed Fritz so much that, from daybreak the next day until 3 p.m., he poured into us, without a second's respite, the most terrific volume of high explosive of every variety we had yet endured. For nine hours it lasted, and they were mainly British shells he fired, for he had captured millions of them, as well as the guns. We had thought his shells bad enough, but our own seemed worse. And how extravagant he was with them! He seemed determined to fire every shell he had captured, and he had the range to a T. We had not a single dugout, and so, cold and miserable, we could only crouch down in the muddy trenches in the pitiless rain. There was not an inch of trench that was not knee-deep in mud.

Then a few of our own guns replied. They had been hurried up, but Fritz's shells numbered well over a hundred to one of ours.

For over nine hours our stretcher-bearers, runners and linesmen were over-worked; and gallantly, as usual, they did their job. And so did the men who had simply to stand up to it—the common or garden Diggers. As fast as telephone communication was restored, so fast was it severed again; as fast as the bearers carried one man away, so would another call go for them. We tried to keep the men apart in order to minimize casualties, but they desired each other's company more than ever I noticed be-

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fore, and soon got together again in twos and threes.

The Diggers were never before or since so solemnly serious as in that last dreadful week of March, 1918. They had seen an army in disorder, and they knew, each one did, how much depended on them. There was no swearing or Digger joking until the Hun push had definitely ceased. Then they relieved themselves, and were soon the same old Diggers. It was good to hear them swear and joke again.

Man after man came along to beg a cigarette, the only comfort in that muddy, noisy, hissing, hurtling hell. My oldest sergeant, an original man, who had missed nothing, regarded it as his worst experience. One of my strongest men fainted from sheer nerve-strain, and two of the bravest were shell-shocked, one trembling violently in spite of every effort to control himself, the other jumping at even a word. I gave these unnerved men the opportunity of going back with the stretcher-bearers, but there wasn't a man there who would go. They only begged for more cigarettes. The N.C.O.'s were worthy examples to their sections.

During the day we learnt that German officers, in British uniforms, had been giving orders to the Tommies to retire. I therefore gave orders that anyone giving such an order should be shot at once. Everyone seemed pleased to receive this command, for there had been rumours of our flanks having fallen back and that we should also

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have to conform with them. Our men like something definite. The hardest part was having to sit still and watch for the enemy's coming. But he didn't come that day, for he had quickly learnt that Australians were most dangerous with their backs up against it.

We allowed him time to recover from his nasty temper. Then, next day we took the initiative again, advancing posts out towards him, right across our front, and raiding his machine-gun nests at unearthly hours. The New Zealanders on our right did the same, and in one splendid raid captured two hundred and fifty prisoners and one hundred and ten machine guns. We captured seventy in one raid, ten in another, and many ones and twos.

The Diggers were glad of the opportunity of doing something. Their eagerness was shown the day after the nine-hours' endurance test. At 3 p.m., in broad daylight, we were ordered to advance three hundred yards. Although nearly all were enjoying their first sleep for seventy hours, we took the new position and had begun consolidating by 3.30. The third machine-gun nest we raided was difficult, so we put up a three-minutes' "hurry-up" with Stokes' mortars on it before rushing it. When the only surviving German was passed to the rear he saw these mortars and exclaimed disgustedly, "No bon cannon!"

These raids stirred Fritz up again, and down came another ten-hour barrage, as violent as the

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earlier one. "Flying-pigs," five-nines, four-twos, our eighteen-pounders and howitzer shells all mixed up, came this time. But still, except for raiding an isolated post, he refused to come to close quarters. He simply vented his spite on us. From the moment he met us his advance ceased; from the moment we took the initiative he began to fall back.

Then I was asked to recommend *six* of my company for decorations! Had I been asked to name one who had *not* earned a whole row of decorations that week, I couldn't have done it. The four exceedingly splendid men who received medals all agree with me.

Twenty days we were in Hébuterne front line, except for one night, when we were relieved to have our feet treated. We went back a quarter-of-a-mile to the "Catacombs." There is a letter among our records from our British Divisional Commander. (We had had four of them, having been handed over from one to the other like trench stores.) In it he states that he kept us there so long because he had no other troops he could trust with the defence of such an important town.

The night we were relieved many men were too weak to walk the five miles back to Cogneux. Limbers carried some the latter part; some rode on officers' horses which made several trips, and many took over five hours to drag themselves back by stages.

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CHAPTER XXXIX

Hebuterne Sidelights

WHEN, after beating the Hun, we returned to Cogneux for a short rest, we were surprised to find that our horses and mules looked a lot better than ever we had noticed before. The 7th A.S.C. also had a splendid lot—not a moke among them. We also had a full complement, although a great many had been killed during the month. Imperial Staff Officers from the 19th, 37th and 42nd Divisions, searched our horse lines and examined the stock, looking for their distinguishing marks; but they had a lot to learn about horse—or mule—camouflaging. I am afraid we left bad reputations with these divisions. An English Major, visiting us, remarked: "I know we're losing our best horses and mules with you chaps amongst us; but, it's worth it."

After requisitioning three times for bombs, urgently required, and not getting them, we sent our limbers one night to a bomb-dump in the rear, where they filled up, and delivered us the goods.

Four days later a Major from D.A.D.O.S. remarked to our Colonel: "By the way, sir, I'm forwarding those grenades this evening. We've had a beastly job keeping up supplies."

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"We don't want them now; we got plenty two nights ago," replied our Colonel.

The Major was visibly annoyed, and, as he and his party walked homewards, was heard to remark: "Those Australians are indeed stout folk; but, like Leeds merchants, socially impossible."

That their organization was bad in more ways than one was clearly demonstrated to us in Hébuterne Catacombs. When, as I have stated, we arrived here for foot-treatment after sixteen days in the front line, we found about one-hundred Tommies occupying part of the underground pipe-clay tunnels and chambers. They were all suffering frightfully from trench feet, having no one to attend to them except their splendid padre, whom I saw personally washing and rubbing their feet.

Not only were their feet in a terrible state, but they were absolutely starving. After watching our men eat their first hot meal, they waited near the scrap tins to pick up what they could—bits of fat, scraps of bread and army biscuits. We could hardly believe our eyes; but, recovering from their astonishment, every Digger immediately passed over to them what he could. Then they eagerly seized our dixies and cleaned up the little gravy left. And not a complaint from them.

We helped their splendid padre to carry down wood and water. They had all been lost by their officers and headquarters, for no one had brought them anything for a week—not even an

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order—and they didn't know where their headquarters were. I never saw a less initiative, or more cheerless lot in my life. Our Diggers were weary but they yarned and smoked, and sang to a mouth-organ, but these Tommies simply sat round, waiting for someone to tell them to do something.

We learned that over seventy per cent. of a Tommy battalion on our left were evacuated with trench feet within a week. Negligence and inefficiency on their officers' part alone caused it, and lack of understanding on the men's part; for, in our whole brigade we had not a single evacuation with trench feet in twice the time.

It seems boastful for an Australian to write this, but I feel far indeed from boastful. I feel proud to belong to an "efficient" brigade, and "boil-over" when I think that these Tommies, who should be much the same as Diggers, are so utterly devoid of self-reliance and initiative.

CHAPTER XL

Back with our Corps again

ON the way down from Hébuterne towards Villers-Bretonneux we passed many French regiments. It was getting on towards the end of April and big movements of troops were in progress.

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At Coisy I watched a fine battalion of 12th Chasseurs Alpins march into the town to billets. They marched with fixed bayonets, flying flags and playing bands, at a step of 160 to the minute; quick, short steps, and with full packs; heavier, I believe, than our own. It was a most inspiring sight, especially as they had just completed a twenty-two kilometre march, having come from Italy and detrained south of Amiens.

The officers insisted on my joining them at mess, after inquiring from the family about me, for I was the first Australian they had seen. They were the essence of politeness, not only to me, but to each other. For mess we had rice in hot milk, horse steak underdone, green peas, conserve and cheese. They toasted Australia and myself in champagne.

Then we bivouacked near Allonville, in the Bois de Mai—so beautiful in its pink and white buds, and its ground covered with wild jonquils and violets.

Here, at Allonville, the French were speaking with contempt of the English, on account of the 5th Army retreat, even comparing them with the Portuguese. I got very annoyed at a roomful of Frenchmen making this comparison, and pointed out that while the 5th Army was running thirty-five miles, the French Army on its right ran forty-five. Unfortunately, some few of our men, in conversation with the French, speak disparagingly of the Tommies. One

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never hears a Frenchman belittle any part of his own army.

Here, on Anzac Day, we heard of the recapture of Villers-Bretonneux. This gave renewed confidence to the country people around Amiens. They just wanted it, too, for the whole place was in a disturbed condition.

At Daours the whole town had been looted, or turned inside out, by people hurriedly grabbing what they could before going farther back.

The looting was done before we arrived. I have never seen an Australian loot. We made ourselves comfortable in places that were being smashed to pieces by shell fire and have lived on pigs, fowls and rabbits that would otherwise have died, and we have souvenired a great deal; but if a thing could be saved for its owner who might return after the war, the Diggers always did their best to make it as safe as possible. Valuable ornaments and pieces of furniture have been placed in corners of cellars time and time again to prevent shells smashing them.

In Amiens, at present, are two French civilians lying dead in the street, with notices on them which read: "Shot for looting. Beware!" They were civilians of Boulogne who had hurried down when they heard of the exodus from Amiens. French soldiers, who caught them in a shop, asked no questions, but shot them on the spot and then placarded them.

Latterly, I have been particularly struck with the absence of sectarianism in the army. All

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men are brothers to each other in the truest sense of the word, and our Chaplains, on the whole, aim at placing Christianity, instead of church religion, before us. Men, of any or no denomination, have plenty of time for "dinkum padres." I believe this absence of sectarianism is helped by the fact that the chaplains here are not competing for funds, big buildings and institutions, or for supporters for their churches. They are out to be brothers to us all, and even to each other.

CHAPTER XLI

In Villers-Bretonneux

AS Gas Officer it has been my duty to visit the houses and cellars throughout Villers-Bretonneux, to prepare them for occupation by troops, and to mark dangerous places. The whole town reeked of gas; we smelt it as we approached within a quarter of a mile on any side of it. It also reeked of that awful battlefield smell, dead men and animals.

I put up several danger notices on badly-gassed rooms and cellars, and opened doors and windows everywhere to clear the rooms. My notices, however, were useless, for whenever a Digger read "KEEP OUT—DANGEROUS!" or "GAS IN HERE!" he immediately thought

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that someone had a plant of champagne there and had only put up the notice to keep it select.

I saw many beautiful homes smashed to pieces. That the people had left in a hurry was evident from the fact that dinners were left on the ovens, dishes of potatoes half peeled, clothes in the wash, wardrobes and personal effects abandoned. They had made up their minds and gone on the spur of the moment. There were dozens of rabbits, cats, canaries and pigeons dead from gas.

Apparently many wealthy people of Amiens lived here, and they knew how to choose a delightful spot. It is a truly inspiring sight to stand near the farthest point of the German advance on the hill north-west of Villers-Bretonneux and to gaze at Amiens with its superb cathedral, in the midst of the city and accompanied by dozens of smaller spires, almost at our feet to the west; at the picturesque valleys of the Somme, the Ancre and the Avre, with the beautiful ancient towers of Corbie Church, and spires of Aubigny and Daours, all surrounded by green clumps; and over towards the Bois l'Abbé and Bois de Hangard.

What a contrast to the view to the east from the roof of our Chateau Headquarters! There, every village is in ruins, for have not the Huns visited them twice in the past few years? Germans are now moving in and near all these villages, clouds of dust and smoke from our shells often causing them to scatter or hasten; a

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German transport column down near Marcel-cave, which our artillery observers must also see while we are watching, for we observe a hundred shell-bursts in and around them; then a single horseman galloping away.

An enemy balloon is up over Warfusee-Abaucourt; their air squadrons travel north and south from Bray down towards Rosières—always well on their own side of the lines. Our 'planes have crossed over; there is sharp rattling of machine guns; there is a German doing a spiral nose-dive; no, he is falling! He has crashed! Our 'planes are surrounded by an "Archie" barrage; all are again safely back and soaring over our heads as if they had done nothing.

There they cross again! No, it is another of our squadrons that has suddenly appeared from behind a white cloud very high up. How they swoop down on the surprised enemy! Another Fritz falls with a streak of fire and smoke shooting from his tail, and our 'planes are back with us again, after machine-gunning the Hun trenches as they crossed. The enemy 'planes are over every night lately, bombing railways, roads, dumps, towns, hospitals, camps—anywhere and everywhere—but daylight keeps them to their own side.

. . . . . .

The Tommies who assisted in the "mopping-up" of Villers-Bretonneux had a very rough

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time. This morning I saw what I took to be a platoon of Durham Light Infantry resting in a sunken road to the north of the town. Some were sitting on their packs, some lying down against the bank, two across the centre of the track, one about ten yards away from the rest—many gripping their rifles—thirty altogether, but all dead. They must have been caught resting in this sunken road by German machine-gunners ambushed in that clump of bushes two hundred yards away, near the Crucifix.

In the cellars we find gruesome sights. In one, three big Germans with empty bottles around them, all too drunk to notice the gas that soon changed their drunken sleep into a permanent one. The gas turned them black. In another a bayonet struggle has taken place between Germans and Tommies. A third cellar shows us a more pleasant side; a wounded Tommy and seven Germans living together for several days after our recapture of the town, on chipped potatoes; the Germans tending the Tommy until they were found.

Another wounded Tommy was less fortunate, but he showed an example of fortitude that would be hard to surpass. There he was on one of our stretchers being carried to the R.A.P. smoking a cigarette. His thigh not only frightfully shattered and torn, but septic. He had been wounded ten days before, when the Germans attacked Villers-Bretonneux, and had since lain out in a shell-hole, in the cold and wet by

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night, and the hot sun by day, until found by our patrol. They heard him trying to attract their attention, believing they were Germans. When he found they were Australians, he caught the sergeant by the neck, kissed him over and over again, and then went hysterical. Recovering, he said he had eaten grass, and that it seemed to him he had been lying out there for ages. He had heard patrols moving about for over a week; but, believing them to be Germans, he had held out until he could hold out no longer. The poor chap's leg was frightful, and the Doc. held out no hope of his living more than a few hours.

After bringing him in, the patrol returned and got a prisoner who was a great coward. We wanted him, having been ordered to get a prisoner for our Intelligence Staff, or he would have been left there, for he lay down, squealed and refused to move in front of his escort, thinking, evidently, that they would shoot him in the back. He had to be carried hundreds of yards, squealing like a stuck pig, before he could be prevailed upon to walk, assisted by bayonet prods in his rear. Even then he kept looking back in terror.

Across a road-junction at the east end of the town there is a barricade of furniture—a hundred yards of it—fastened together and intertwined with dozens and dozens of strands of barbed-wire. The Germans had carried out from neighbouring houses, shops and factories,

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all kinds of furniture—three pianos, an organ, several sewing machines, suites of furniture, book-shelves, beds, tables, sideboards, boxes—anything they could lay their hands on—for this barricade. Bayonets had perforated every piece to make the wire-holes. And it was of no value to them, for our 12th and 13th Brigades got to its rear by their splendid encircling movement.

It makes one sad to see not only this furniture, but any house here now. Our Headquarters will serve for example:

Until last month it was the delightful home of a rich woollen manufacturer. His factory next door was large, well-equipped, and up-to-date. We saved what we could for the French Mission, and sent back tons of wool, guernseys and machinery. We are still saving what we can by putting clocks, ornaments, pictures and small pieces of furniture into cellars. This is done spontaneously by many, as there have been no orders on the matter except in connection with the salvaging of wool and machinery. But every now and again a shell smashes into a piano, sideboard, room of glassware stored away, library, nursery or conservatory. When the end wall of this chateau was blown to pieces, the roof fell through the main hall, staircase, library, parlour, bedrooms and nursery, destroying them and everything in them. Just the things one would love to have in his home: inlaid tables with carved legs, marble clocks, alabaster models, bronzes and brasses of every age, large mirrors,

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children's motor cars, dolls, and toys, vases and china of great value, paintings, and so on.

Three large woollen mills are wrecked and thousands of pounds of wool lying everywhere. That the Germans are short of wool and cotton is evident, for every dead German's pack is stuffed with either one or the other.

I leave it to the reader to imagine the Diggers' life in the outposts—the constant digging, wiring, patrolling, raiding and advancing. Never a night without a post here, a bit of trench there, lost by Fritz. Never a night without our shells tearing his positions to pieces; never a day without hurricane bombardments of gas shells from both sides. We sent 5,000 gas shells in ten minutes into the miniature Monument Wood, and such crashes are common. The enemy has changed his artillery tactics. He has up till lately been so methodical in his shelling, that we got to know dangerous places; but here, at Villers-Bretonneux, he crashes down any minute hundreds of shells. Just the crash—a thousand shells in a few seconds—and then somewhere else. He has never had a night's peace since he lost Villers-Bretonneux. He has never advanced a yard anywhere, and he has never had his front line the same for two successive days, in spite of his devilish gas-shells, of which he seems to have tremendous supplies, and in which the gas seems more effective than ever before.

There are rumours that he is going to push again towards Amiens, but he will find Villers-

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Bretonneux a tremendously hard nut this time. We have barbed-wired the whole town in such a way that every inch of any advance he may attempt is swept by well-protected machine guns; every road is mined over and over again for his tanks if they should come; every post and trench he may capture is commanded by two others, and we have support and reserve trench systems, well wired, right back to Blangy-Tronville. And now Amiens too is well entrenched, and even the line between Amiens and Abbeville. Every day or so Colonel Murray—previously of our battalion—is up here in his shirt sleeves, on a push bike, examining his battalion's machine-gun positions. Our only fear is that Fritz *won't* come.

But our own "heads" evidently believe there are more ways of beating the Germans than by fighting. They are giving them back some of their own propaganda. Ever since the war began Fritz has been sending over, tied to paper balloons, French newspapers, in order to influence the French population against England, telling them England is using them for her own ends, that she will hold on to Calais, that she is, and always has been, everything a nation shouldn't be, and that they should really try to love their true friends, the Germans, as the French people in the German-occupied parts of France have learnt to do.

An official photographer has been here looking for "heaps of dead Fritzes" to photograph.

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Thousands of these photos are to be dropped in Germany to show the German people what they have had to pay for their recent advance. We showed him the best we could—about fifty lying along a short stretch of road. But he wasn't satisfied; there weren't enough of them. So we rearranged them, and got some more from round about, making what ought to be a very effective propaganda-photo.

CHAPTER XLII

Fun in the Support Line

MAY 5th, 1918—Am writing this as the sun is setting, just at the north-west of Villers-Bretonneux. We have just had the laugh of a lifetime, although none of us can laugh aloud on account of our gassed throats. Anyone would have laughed to see our chaps at Villers-Bretonneux any afternoon lately.

This afternoon I saw what appeared to be Frenchmen of great style coming along from the town with wonderfully dressed demoiselles on their arms. The Diggers have found wardrobes in practically every house in the town, and have adorned or made themselves comfortable with the contents. Many have simply changed dirty, chatty singlets for soft silk blouses; but these afternoon parties are a complete all-over change.

Picture a stove-pipe hat, so very shiny, high

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collar and tie, swallow-tailed or frock coat, nicely-creased trousers, a walking-stick, bouquet and gloves , with a "piece of fluff" on its arm—large Parisian hat, low-necked blouse (décolleté, I imagine) of any striking colour, latest skirt, or blouse and skirt in one (I don't know what to call them) silk stockings and high-heeled shoes (naturally the largest to be found in the town) a feather-boa or a set of furs, a beautifully coloured parasol, and a few daubs of paint and powder.

Picture many couples like this one, promenading the town, into which a shell or a "crash" came spasmodically, and then returning "home" to tea in the support trench or along a green bank.

I would like my friends in Australia just to have seen the French soldiers themselves when they first saw these "Digger Frenchmen and demoiselles." Above all to have seen their bewilderment on the first occasion such a party approached their post at the western entrance to the town. They really believed they were in a land of miracles when they saw the style of Paris or Amiens transferred to the tumbling, shattered streets of Villers-Bretonneux. The sentry on the bridge over the railway excitedly called up his comrades, and the group of eight stood speechless. The party approached, examining the sights like fashionable tourists.

As they came up to the silent gazers, a really attractive "demoiselle" left "her" partner,

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smiled and bowed to them, and asked the corporal: "Voulez-vous promenader avec moi, monsieur?"

Madam et Mademoiselle Deegaire

The voice gave the show away, but the Frenchmen entered into the spirit of the joke entirely; and, gallantly offering their arms to the sweet creatures, escorted them across a series of trenches, and held their dainty skirts away from the barbed wire. And then to see the cavalier farewell by the poilus, as each "Monsieur

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Deegaire" retook his demoiselle, and led her home here. And to see the dainty demoiselles eating their stew so daintily from their mess-tins, and sipping their tea so nicely (one blew it cool with her fan) from their mess-tin lids, and enjoying the lettuce and spring onions from the town gardens, showing the while plenty of stocking, silk petticoats, embroideries and "undies" of every delicacy!

It makes our support line life like a series of Gipsy teas. More so, when the piano (which was pushed along yesterday on a handcart, and installed under a small tree) rattles out good dance music and a set of Lancers commences.

Of course, some of the "ladies" must go and get wounded, and off they must be sent on stretchers to the R.A.P., and from there on to the dressing station, field ambulance and casualty clearing station in their "pretties." These they have to lose at the C.C.S., where pyjamas are issued, and here may be seen dainty crepe-de-chines, silks and satins, mixed up with dirty, blood-stained khaki.

We are in view of the Boche 'planes, and within easy reach even of their field guns; but our chaps won't be dull, while they can make fun. Unfortunately the "pretties" have not been able to stop pieces of shells, and more than one good Australian wears his "pretties" in his soldier's grave, smiling at them as he went West. Their uniforms have been reverently put in with them. Who with a *man's* spirit would be away

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from such men, even if the war were "an unjust one?"

CHAPTER XLIII

The Extreme Right of the British Army

IT was certainly a post of honour—the extreme right of the British Army on the Western Front, just where we joined with the French. The Australians were holding the whole of the 4th Army front. In the Aubigny Line, between Villers-Bretonneux and Aubigny, we were in touch with the Zouaves—a splendid French division. Our extreme right post contained four Diggers and four Frenchmen, and great friends they always were, exchanging rations, souvenirs and cigarettes, each trying to give the other the advantage of the exchange.

The French express wonder and admiration at the excellent condition of our horses and mules and the shining parts of our limbers and cookers. Their animals are certainly to be pitied, for they are bad horsemen, knocking their poor, ill-fed brutes up quickly. They regard our shining of cookers, limber-parts and harness, as useless labour. Their own cookers are covered with grease many days old, and their vehicles and harness look as if they had never been cleaned during the war.

The French "seventy-fives" are wonderful, but they are careful not to allow too close an inspec-

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tion of them. The gunners love them, and a word of praise sets them firing them off as rapidly as possible, just to show what they can do. They shoot a great many shells without relaying the gun, such a wonderful recoil-spring and barrel-steel has it. During a barrage I watched them firing, and several of their shells were evidently falling in their own trenches, for their "short" signals went up, but the gunners took no notice. Again and again they went up, but still the "seventy-fives" barked.

I mentioned the "short" signals to an officer, but he replied, shrugging his shoulders, "They are there, monsieur; we are here. C'est la guerre." I remained quiet after that. Here the French had more meat to eat than they wanted, on account of dozens of our horses being killed. We simply drag a dead horse off the road to bury him, but the Frenchmen come along and cut off the choice pieces.

In the last company, each Digger took his turn at being the extreme right-hand man of the British Line, and right proud most of them were of it too. One remarked "I hope 'Dug' doesn't order the Army to 'Change Direction Left,' or we'll have to do some doubling." Yes, it was a post of honour.

Haig may not think much of us as soldiers from a disciplinary point of view—saluting, and, above all, feeling and showing the essential awe in the presence of the higher ranks, so necessary for a successful career as an N.C.O. or officer in

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the "Tommy" Army—but he puts us where there is something critical to do. N.C.O.'s and officers brought up in the atmosphere of that school can never get into the hearts of those under them. The "Tommy" is always uncomfortable in the presence even of a corporal.

There are a few Australian higher officers who believe in this attitude, and who do their best to bring their commands into what they consider to be the correct state of mind. I call to mind an Australian General on Salisbury Plain who loved it. He visited his units with all the pomp and mock awe-inspiring presence of a barbarian chieftain of old, followed, as he galloped across the training grounds, at due respectful distance, by a host of attendants, any one of whom he would expect to be as a worm unto him if occasion offered.

When he visited, the men felt that their officers and N.C.O.'s were altogether different beings to what they had known them to be. Everyone was uncomfortable until he went; no one respected him, or his advice; and yet outwardly he had seen that everybody had felt his presence, everybody had bowed to the wisdom of the dozen words he had deigned to speak.

And when he departed, all—officers, N.C.O.'s and men—got back to their earnest, personal, and therefore pleasant, training in bombing, bayonet-fighting, wiring, gas-drill, musketry, etc., with the feeling of relief that real work

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could now be done instead of the sham eyewash always presented to such a visitor.

I call to mind also a Salisbury Plain adjutant of this school, to enter whose presence gave one the feeling of approaching the Communion Table at one's first Communion.

Many French officers with whom I have conversed lately, have remarked that they have never, even in their own army, seen such true camaraderie between officers and men, as in the Australian army. The French are generally most courteous towards their men, and the poilu most respectful towards, or in speaking of, his officers.

CHAPTER XLIV

Devil's Breath at Villers-Bretonneux

HE had been shelling us violently for an hour with H.E. shells of every calibre. Then we noticed that some of them began to burst with a muffled report and several were set down as "duds." The gas officer listened most intently, not only to the bursts, but watched for a supposed "dud." He listened also to the shells screaming through the air to hear the sound he knew the gas shell made—ever so slightly different to the others. The wind was just right for it, and he believed a gas bombardment had commenced, the H.E. bombard-

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ment being only a blind; but he desired to make sure before rattling.

"There's another 'dud!'" some one exclaimed; but the specialist had seen this "dud" burst, although the fact that it made practically no report led most to think it was a "dud." He had seen, from where the shell fell a thin whitish cloud spread out, and, as it spread, turn paler, then invisible.

He immediately seized the gas-rattle, and whirled it vigorously round. Its piercing, distinctive rattling was taken up at the R.A.P., support company, pioneers and front line companies. Many had been suspicious of these "duds" and mild reports, and were only waiting for someone to start the rattling. Many would sooner risk being gassed than commence rattling or putting on masks, for one who was over-precautionary was liable to be termed "windy."

There was now ear-splitting rattling far and wide. Fritz evidently heard it and decided that camouflage with H.E. was no longer of much use. So over he sent simply thousands of gas shells of all kinds; blue cross shells with their irritants for noses and throats; green cross shells with their chloropicrin to cause coughing and vomiting, and their lethal phosgenes and diphosgenes to cause death; yellow cross shells with their mustard gases of about twenty varieties, to burn and blister the skin to agony point, the eyes to a fixed gaping stare or to blindness, and the lungs to suffocation, or to send men

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into delirium from the effects on blood and nerves.

Soon there were running eyes, whispering voices, sneezings, coughings, vomitings, and mad tearings at throats and chests on all sides. There were smells of pineapple, bad honey, musty hay, vinegar, smoke, dust, and explosive, all mixed up together.

There was no doubt about it now. The front lines and outposts were saturated with it. It could be seen from the roof of Battalion Headquarters as a very light mist, some parts lying rather more heavily in places than in others. Weird-looking creatures—the Diggers in their masks—could be seen facing the direction from which the shells were coming. Every man had been waked up and was at his S.O.S. post, rifle in hand. Except for the dull shell-bursts, with an occasional shrapnel to catch the men who had to keep out of gassed dugouts, there was silence. Except for stretcher-bearers, in their masks, moving across the top with a load, two runners, also masked, ducking across to the flank company, whose telephone lines had been cut, and four linesmen, also in masks, looking for the breaks in the wires, there was no movement anywhere, as any movement caused that deeper breathing which all tried to avoid.

Cellars and dugouts are the most dangerous places for gas which always finds its way downwards. Headquarters and the R.A.P. have double gas-proof doors, made of six blankets

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each, weighted to keep the bottom down. These have been wetted from buckets kept handy for the purpose in order to render them the more gas proof, the water blocking up the pores in the material.

In the new, and continually-advancing, trench-system at Villers-Bretonneux there had been no time to make dugouts, let alone gas-proof ones. A makeshift dugout had been made for the Officers Commanding, as it was necessary for each O.C. to keep in constant touch with Head-quarters, and with it were required signallers and runners; and some blankets had been hung, ready to drop in a gas attack. So the company commanders in the line and support have dropped their doors, and are now as hermetically sealed as possible from the outside. They and their staffs sit in a sweltering heat and in darkness, for even a candle consumes the oxygen so precious to them.

Occasionally a signaller flashes his torch, or lights a match to write down a message, or let his O.C. read one. The "poff! poff! poff!" of the gas-shells sounds to them like someone treading on big dry toadstools. Occasionally one would burst near the entrance, the explosion lifting the blanket and sending down a whiff of gas. An officer raises the blanket, tumbles downstairs in the darkness and speaks smotheredly through his mask. "About twenty of my men are vomiting and cannot keep their

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masks on, and the others think they'll be the same soon."

"It's all up with them if they can't keep their helmets on," replied the O.C. through his mask. "Send as many as possible with the stretcher-bearers. They're not supposed to walk themselves, but they can't stay here without masks. Let the milder cases walk back slowly, and send the worst down here until the bearers return."

A second platoon officer reports likewise; and, as he retires, a runner from the third platoon out in an isolated trench, hands in a report:

"Myself and platoon practically done. All sneezing or vomiting violently, and none can keep helmets on. Eyes are very bad."

The company commander immediately codes a message through to battalion, "RMKYZ ZRUPK KUGMP MNRZZ 123AA." He doesn't want the German instruments to pick up the fact of his company's plight.

The adjutant quickly decodes the message and hands to the colonel: "'A' Company practically done. All gassed badly and becoming worse."

"Get me 'Don' Company!" the colonel orders the sigs.

He speaks to the O.C. "Don" in a camouflaged way, so that even were his words picked up by a Fritz listener, nothing could be made of them. "'D' Company is ordered to send two platoons forward immediately after dark to relieve 'A.'"

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"Can't do it, sir! Nine turnips are not enough for a stew like that, and that's all I have."

The support company has only nine men left. Then another coded buzz is received from "A." The O.C. cannot speak as he has lost his voice, and his headquarters are full of gas. The warmth has vaporized the gas out of the clothes of the patients he has had brought in, and has gassed them all. He has not an officer nor N.C.O. fit to carry on, and less than ten men.

"He won't attack while his gas is hanging about, at any rate," remarked the colonel. "Get me Brigade!"

While waiting for Brigade, an R.A.P. orderly comes in with the message that the M.O. is gassed and cannot carry on. The gas got into the R.A.P. in spite of every precaution. Patients had been undressed in an outer compartment so that their clothes would not bring gas into the dressing room; stretcher-bearers had washed the mud off their boots outside, and had walked through a heap of chloride of lime as a further precaution; but still the gas got in, causing coughing and eye-irritation.

The General ordered a relief for that evening. News of the gas bombardment had reached the rear, and soon a hundred of our 'planes were over the line to watch for enemy movement. Our artillery had commenced counter-battery work.

Then our retaliatory gas bombardment commenced, and eight hours later, as we were being

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relieved, our guns were still pouring it into the enemy.

"We have smothered over and over again, every gun position, cutting, wood and trench, behind the enemy's line with *our* gas this evening," an artillery officer remarked to us as he watched, in the moonlight, the voiceless, sore-eyed battalion going out, with hardly one efficient member and over five-hundred gas casualties, all of whom, later on, got to Blighty.

A few nights later, a little higher up, we sent over a projector-gas bombardment, two thousand projector tubes having been dug in behind our front line, and two thousand immense cylinders of liquid gas hurtled simultaneously down on the enemy's trenches. These cylinders contained several dozen tons of liquid; each ton produced over ten million cubic feet of gas, and each cubic foot of gas poisoned one-hundred million cubic feet of air. There was only one long flash—over a mile long—as the electric currents reached the charges arranged to propel the cylinders.

The enemy saw the flash, felt the ground tremble, and hurriedly buried their heads in their masks. A few hours later they were laughing at our waste of explosive and useless gas. The next morning it was a thing of the past, and the next evening they had forgotten about it.

Then a few were seen to fall and remain still. Others rose to help them; they also fell and remained still. A look of horror came over the

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faces of the others, for they knew their turn was coming soon; had they not also been near those bursting British gas cylinders nearly two days ago? They therefore remained still, looking at the dozens of their dead friends who had been laughing with them at the British gas having not even a smell, a taste or a sting. Those stupid "Pritish!"

. . . . . .

The relieving battalion kept out of the gassed trenches and lay out in the open all night until a breeze sprang up. Then a few entered the trenches and got to work with gas fans, fanning out all corners and dugouts before the rest came in. Still they had gas casualties, for the gas hung about in holes and grass through which they crawled on patrols, for weeks after.

CHAPTER XLV

TIM THE TINKER

A NOTORIOUS lead-swinger and an inveterate dodger was Tim the Tinker. This was not his name, but alongside "Trade or Profession" on his Attestation Form he had written "Tinker." His age might have been anything from nineteen to forty, and his home anywhere where English is supposed to be spoken.

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Tim the Tinker

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The roofs of the huts at Mametz were leaking, and Tim was one of the several picked out to do some tinkering. It was a cold job on icy roofs, so Tim knew nothing about soldering or stopping leaks. In reply to enquiries regarding his "Trade" on his card, he said:

"Well, a couple of us useter do wot we called tinkerin'. We got'n outfit an' went about the country, but we didn't do no tinkerin' for a livin'. We were 'tinkers' if anyone arst inquisitive questions; but we picked up a livin' 'n other ways."

What these ways were he kept to himself. His paybook was "dead" for a year ahead on account of crimes, but he always had money from the sale of "souvenirs." How he obtained these puzzled me until one afternoon I was stationed on duty in Bailleul during German shelling.

There was Tim waiting for shells to come his way, or hurrying to where the last one had fallen. If he got there quickly the shop-keepers were still away in cellars, and Tim got to work among brooches, pipes, watches, champagne, handkerchiefs and knives, filling his pockets and putting a distance between the frightened citizens and himself before they had recovered from the shell-burst or got the dust off their eyes. That evening Tim was rich, and his mates were sewing up souvenirs in the calico off their last parcel from home, to send home again.

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We never rested for long, as Fritz kept us well occupied. Tim seldom got as far as the front line, as his knowledge of such complaints as hernia, synovitis, etc., was good enough to bluff the "docs." until we got one we learnt to call "Dr. Jacques."

The first morning he was with the battalion there was, as was always the case with new "docs.," a big sick parade. But to one after another he remarked, "You're Jacques, medicine and duty!" "You'll be Jacques after a No. 9," or "You'll be Jacques by this evening—Mist. Expect. every two hours!"

The second morning he had Tim and two other genuine cases. Of course there was Tim, for weren't we going into the line that night? Tim had a tremendous temperature, having chewed a few strands of cordite to work it up.

"My word, you've got trench fever," remarked the "doc." Take this powder and I'll see you again this afternoon."

Within an hour Tim was sorry he had sick-paraded, for the "doc.," summing him up correctly, had dosed him. Poor Tim was running every few minutes to the hessian screens, but he received no sympathy from anyone. He was sadder but wiser that afternoon as we fell in. The "doc." had seen him and offered him another powder, telling him, "You'll be Jacques in the morning," to which Tim replied that he felt much better already, and didn't need the second powder.

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Orders were then read out, and among them was one calling for nominations for soldering work at the Corps School. Tim volunteered for the job, and was accordingly sent up to the B.O.R.

"You're a plumber, Private Hodge?" asked the Colonel.

"Yes, sir!" boldly replied our hero.

"Where have you worked at the trade?"

"In 'Scray, mainly; but I've knocked about 'n lots of places in Vic-n-Noo-South."

"Well, Hodge, I'll send you back to Division this evening."

Tim was jubilant and could have turned a double somersault.

"I don't suppose we'll see you back in the battalion again, as every man who has taken on this job before has not lasted long. So you had better take half-an-hour to say good-bye to your mates."

Tim was puzzled. The Colonel had the reputation of being a hard case, but his manner appeared to Tim to be quite serious. Too serious indeed for his liking.

"I wonder wot e's got up 'is sleeve?" muttered Tim, as he returned to his company. "It might be worse'n goin' in the line, an' it's not goin' ter be bad this time."

Tim's curiosity got the better of him, and he returned to the B.O.R.

"Well, Hodge, have you made your will?"

"Wot's this tinkerin' job, sir?"

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"What do you mean?"

"Wot's a chap gotter do if 'e takes on this job?"

"By what I understand it's a risky game, and that's why I told you to say good-bye to your mates. They fill a lot of those new white phosphorus bombs you've been practising with lately, and after the phosphorus is put in they have to be soldered up to make them air-tight. The last ten men sent there by other battalions have averaged about two bombs each before ———. Why! what's wrong, Hodge?"

The perspiration was streaming down Tim's face, and he was pinching himself on the thighs to make sure he was still there. He had gone white in the face and wobbly at the knees.

"What's wrong, Hodge?" repeated the Colonel.

"Nothin', sir, nothin'; only the M.O. gave me some powder the smornin', that's made me feel queer all day, an' that kinder plumbin's not wot I useter do in 'Scray."

"You're down here as a Tinker! Isn't that plumbing?"

"Well, sir; 'tis'n it 'tisn't! My tinkerin' was travellin' about; not workin' with them sorder-irons an' fire. I don't think this job's in my line, sir."

The Colonel smiled to himself, and the Adjutant winked at the orderly-room sergeant. Then the Colonel strafed Tim roundly for wasting his and the B.O.R.'s valuable time.

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As Tim sadly trudged along the duckboards that evening, his mates couldn't make out why he was so quiet and different, refusing even to spin the "browns" while they were sitting around Shrapnel Corner, waiting for darkness before going forward.

"A chap's gotta chance in the line," he murmured, "but at this tinkerin' game ——— ——— ———"; he sadly shook his head.

He ever afterwards agreed with his mates that it was a cruel war.

CHAPTER XLVI

Our Sisters of Australia and of Blighty

I AM sure my readers this far will have had enough of front line and "stunt" jottings. I shall therefore leave to their imagination other Digger stunts, so intensely interesting to those who took part in them, and who lived to see the end of the terrible business; and draw my jottings towards a close by dealing with other sides of our lives over here.

What a wonderful experience to be nicely wounded! Stretchers, wagons, motors, light railways, a French ambulance train, a British ambulance train, American bearers and attendants, "Waacs," a hospital ship, another British Red Cross train, and London ambulances, all

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share in carrying a casualty from the line to the well-known Third London General Hospital.

Nurses and sisters, Blighty and Australian, are all so extremely attentive and wonderfully cheerful, although they must be tired of seeing so much torn flesh and broken bone for so many years.

I expected our own sisters to be bigger women than those of Blighty, but to me the opposite appeared to be the case, although it is impossible to generalize, there are so many exceptions. At least, the sisters of the old country are generally much bigger than I expected them to be—and well-proportioned too.

The French hospital trains are a long way less comfortable than the British, and the change from one to the other was welcome.

And the Australian Red Cross representatives, how keen they are! We all received brushes, soap, chocolates, cigarettes, handkerchiefs and writing material, even before we reached the boat.

And the Digger Sisters! In my ward, in France, the patients were all English or Scottish officers (mostly walking cases) but still there was quite an atmosphere of Australian free-and-easiness, yet thorough efficiency, throughout. The Leicestershire Major said to me as he tidied up his side of the room after making his bed: "Upon my word, old chappie, these sisters of yours are awfully priceless—simply tophole—you know. The first morning I was here they

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had me out and making my own bally bed before I thought of what I was doing; and I've been at it ever since, you know. A thing I've never done before, you know."

In the 3rd L.G.H. the Imperial nurses work from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m., with one afternoon a fortnight off, for 8s. a week. They scrub, sweep and polish, carry meals, feed patients, wash up, and even do men-orderlies' work, the majority of men-orderlies here being schemers and loafers, and quite willing to let the nurses do their work. It is a downright disgrace for them to be allowed, let alone asked, to work, as they do, over thirteen hours a day, for 8s. a week.

Our own Australian Red Cross representative —Miss Harris, from Queensland—the "Digger-ess," is very keen, cheerful, and popular; but everyone is so kind and thoughtful towards us, it would take pages to write down their names, and what they do to entertain us. There are drags and cars every day for patients; teas, concerts, theatre-parties and visits arranged galore.

Even in the London 'buses the poorest Londoner will insist on a wounded Digger taking his or her seat. During the past week I spent a few days near Redhill, Surrey, with a dear old lady of seventy, who delighted to have even a dozen Australians with her at her delightful home. She insisted on our breakfasting in bed —being attended to by an old nurse who was disappointed if she could not do some tying up, dressing or bandaging for us. Each morning,

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Mrs. Alexander, the hostess, came into our rooms after breakfast, with the morning papers and dishes of fruit, asked us how we had slept, gave us her plans for the day's motor-trips, and told us that when we came downstairs at eleven, there would be glasses of milk in the library for us. She does the whole thing in a most charming way, and without any lime-light, or thought of reward, at all.

Others tell of other Englishwomen doing the same. We all say from the bottom of our hearts "God bless them," for they are indeed sterling. And the Australian women in London are splendid too.

CHAPTER XLVII

Why we Pay Six Agents-General and a High Commissioner in London

IT was in an estaminet at Picquigny. While drinking coffee we yarned with several Jocks and Tommies who were eager to learn what they could about Australia.

"D'ye ken Donald McKenzie who went to Australia about fifteen years ago?" asked one Jock of the Diggers present.

He was astonished that we hadn't met him, for he was "a man that could sing a good song and was sure to become well-known."

"Where does he live?" I asked.

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"In Aussie," he replied, as if that ought to have been quite sufficient.

"But where?"

"Oh, in Brisbane or New Zealand, or some other part of Sydney!"

CHAPTER XLVIII

All Saints' Day in France

FRIDAY, 1st NOVEMBER, 1918. To-day, All Saints' Day, was celebrated throughout France with special fervour and solemnity. The day, always a special one in the Church calendar, has been set apart by France as a Manifestation Day, on which, each year, the graves of her heroes, and those of her allies, are to be visited and honoured, not only by the citizens of France, but more especially by her children.

We were specially honoured by being present to-day on such an occasion; at the moment of the collapse of Turkey and Austria, and continued German defeats on the Western Front.

Picardy is always beautiful in autumn, but to-day's bright sunshine made me feel more than ever that great love our allies have for it.

The 16th Battalion, with its band, headed the procession from the Town Hall to the Military Cemetery. Our Westralian brothers were followed by practically all the children of the

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town, accompanied by their teachers, and loaded with bunches and garlands of flowers—roses of Picardy, dahlias and chrysanthemums.

The venerable Father Moy, doyen priest of Picquigny, citizens of all ages, and the youths of the 1920 class—next to be called up—with their tricolour, were near the children. The universally-worn mourning showed how general have been France's sufferings.

The 13th Battalion, with its band, brought up the rear. At the cemetery the scene and ceremony were most impressive, the two Australian battalions being massed around and the children inside. Stirring speeches—read in English later on by the interpreter—by the schoolmaster and doyen, were followed by that never-to-be-forgotten scene, the procession of the children with their flowers in and out along the lines of graves. Little mites barely able to toddle, ordinary school children and senior pupils all proudly and reverently knelt and deposited their floral tokens over the sleeping heroes.

Every man felt a tear welling and a lump rising, and yet it was all so sweet and simple. Every hero's resting place was literally hidden by the children's flowers. We knew that the graves of our own "cobbers" were being honoured in a like manner at the same time in many other parts of France and Belgium, and that they would be so honoured throughout the years to come. The National Anthems of both nations terminated the proceedings.

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The addresses were as follows:

M. DANGREVILLE, SCHOOLMASTER—

"All Saints' Day is consecrated to the memory of the dead in each family. We could not allow this day to pass without coming to pay homage to those who have so well deserved to be made part of the great French Family.

"To appreciate the gigantic work accomplished by the heroes who here sleep their last sleep; to estimate the debt of gratitude we owe them, let us look back. In March, the German armies, by a crushing offensive, threw back the Allied army across our Department, right to Villers-Bretonneux. There only, hastily-collected forces forbade them a farther advance.

"Well then, the heroes sleeping here, are those who, by heavy sacrifices, stayed the invader. We saw them, these soldiers, during those long days, arriving here from the battlefields, covered with mud and blood, bruised, torn, their eyes filled with the vision of the horrid hell they had just left. Not a plaint came from their lips; stoics they had been in battle, stoics they remained, feeling death embracing them. I saw them dying of their frightful wounds without uttering a word. It was a splendid death of a soldier giving his life—his most precious possession—without regrets, for the triumph of an ideal, the welfare of his country, and for civilization against barbarism.

"Noble Victims of Duty! Your sacrifice has not been in vain; you have contributed towards

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Final Victory! For I call to you at the bottom of your graves, and you hear it: VICTORY! It is coming quickly; the victorious banners of the Allies are chasing the treacherous enemy off our France which will soon be free from his defilement.

"British soldiers fallen on the soil of sweet France; you who came to help us to save it, rest in peace! The inhabitants of Picquigny will not forget that it is to you they owe their freedom from invasion's horrors; to you they owe the protection of their hearths. You will be the object of our veneration, and we shall come each year to place flowers on your graves as a token of gratitude and admiration.

"And you children who hear me; and you young men of the 1920 class, who have lived with us during these dark days, what a lesson in history is this scene for you! You see that heroes do not die; that the remembrance of their deeds lives for ever. If one day the country calls you for its defence, do not hesitate to give your life for it; for the best fate, and the most to be envied, is to die for one's country.

"Young pupils! When you pass by this cemetery, never forget the gratitude and respect you owe to the soldiers sleeping here; never enter this resting place to play; when near, uncover your heads, lower your voices, and remember—for, as our great Victor Hugo said:*

*(I thank Chaplain Harper of the 16th Battalion for this translation of Hugo's poem.)

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"Good is it for one's country to die:
Good is it that ye mourners are nigh:
Great is their name on the record of Fame,
Great is their glory devoid of all shame.
As a mother will mourn her offspring so dear
So their Country for them sheds many a tear.
Then Glory to our Eternal France,
And to those who thus her Glory enhance!
Who came to her rescue and fought with their might,
Who gave up their all, and died for the Right;
Whose names now are placed in the Temple on High,
Who left us a pattern of how men should die!"

REVEREND M. MOY, DOYEN OF PICQUIGNY—

"It is necessary to live in the times that we are living in to see such a celebration.

"It is one of the characteristics of this war to have shown to us the most unexpected things, the most glorious and the most consoling; but also, alas! the most sorrowful.

"All are raising their voices everywhere in this patriotic manifestation, to celebrate the courage and valour of all the allied nations.

"It is a pride and an honour to me to be entrusted to-day to utter this praise in the presence of the most valiant troops of the British Army.

"For us, Ladies and Gentlemen, what historical memories are recalled by this manifestation? It will occupy a place in the history of Picquigny after that of August, 1475, when King Edward IV of England and Louis XI of France met at Picquigny to sign the treaty of peace, which was, in reality the recommencement of commercial relations with England after the Hundred Years' War.

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"The reunion to-day presents another character. It is to honour the heroes of the two nations who have fought together for over four years for Right, Justice and Liberty.

"To these heroes we owe special gratitude. It is to them; it is to you, my General; to you, Officers and Soldiers of the British Army; above all, to you, Australian Soldiers, that we extend at this moment our most grateful and warmest thanks. You have saved for us our beautiful city of Amiens, with its superb cathedral, one of the joys of the world. It is to you that we owe, we people of Picquigny, and of all this country, our not having been obliged to flee from our homes, to abandon our ancient, historical relics, so interesting and so beloved. We shall never be able to do too much for you in witness of our gratitude.

"We know your prowess, Australian Soldiers. We had here, for twelve days, one of your brilliant conquests—the 'Bertha' that bombarded Amiens. It told afterwards to Paris your glorious exploits; it now relates them to London.

"Thanks to you, valiant liberators of our land of Picardy! We will never forget what the Australian troops are, who, aided by Allied troops, wrested our darling country from the cruel talons of a barbarous and inhuman enemy! But in what condition, Great God!

"We greet here all the heroes who met their death on those dreadful battlefields, especially

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those buried in our cemeteries, and of whom we have the glorious guardianship.

"Ah! Ladies and Gentlemen! On this All Saints' Day, and for this ceremony which brings us together, it seems to me that the heavens are opened, and that, even as did St. John, in the Apocalypse, our enchanted eyes look on those who were marked on the forehead servants of God, and who form one immense throng from all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues. They have fought the good fight; they will have the reward of valiant soldiers. For over four years we have followed them striving; but for four months we have just followed, breathless, enthusiastic, over the rough but glorious fields of victory, the irresistible push and continuous advance, of all the allied soldiers.

"Forward, Champions of Right, Justice, Liberty and Christian Civilization! By the King Eternal, Sovereign Master of Events, they form an immense army of all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues.

"For these heroes who have fought, and those who are still fighting the good fight of a just and equitable God against the haughty hosts of the 'Old God' of 'Kultur' from beyond the Rhine, there are being prepared triumphant ovations, the joyous echoes of which will resound throughout the world.

"Yes, on the day of the victorious Peace, the bright dawn of which is already breaking, we all, who have faith in 'Those who reign in the

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heavens,' and 'Who will restore all empires,' will thank the God of Armies for having given light to the leaders, courage to the soldiers, confidence and tenacity to all. We shall sound the praises, with transports of gratitude and a patriotic pride, of all the heroes whose labour, blood or tears, have brought about deliverance. Our banners floating on high will not then carry crape—our glorious dead would not allow that.

"In similar circumstances, Judas Maccabeus, the valiant champion of Jewish independence against the Kings of Syria, on the morrow of a great victory, ordered that the dead should be buried, and that monuments should be raised over their graves in order to honour the bodies of soldiers who had fought valiantly. Does not the same thought come to you at this moment, in confiding to the hands of your children the flowers they are going to place on the graves of the heroes who have given their lives for the independence of our dear native land and of the world? And it is the same thought which shall animate us, when soon we shall be praying in our Church for their souls. For, as said again Judas Maccabeus: 'It is holy and wholesome to pray for those who have died for their country.'

"In one of her prophetic visions our Blessed Jeanne d'Arc said: 'The French and the English united will do greater things than have ever been done in Christianity!' Behold then, the prophecy of our Saint fulfilled! France and England united have been able to rally round them, in

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the defence of a just and holy cause—the Liberty of Nations against the most terrible of tyrannies, —the great peoples of the world. From their common efforts we see our enemies conquered, asking grace.

"Still another effort, Ladies and Gentlemen! And it is being made at this moment. Then, France entirely rewon; valiant Belgium liberated; our armies on the Rhine! FINAL VICTORY!"

CHAPTER XLIX

Armistice Day at Picquigny on the Somme

NOVEMBER 11th, 1918. Armistice evening. Picquigny. No beer, wine or champagne left in the town. No parades, except for a Guard, to-day. And yesterday we were preparing to go in again to make another push.

As soon as the news came through, all, soldiers and civilians, assembled on the Square; the soldiers to hear the "dinkum oil" from the General, the civilians to celebrate. I saw real tears in the eyes of many of the hardiest Diggers. Officers and men, soldiers and civilians, all shook hands with everyone. There was no noise; but the general feeling of relief that the slaughter was over, and the feeling that home was at last near, could be felt. Many a

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man came up to an officer or N.C.O. with whom he had been in many a battle, and spontaneously they seized hands and wrung warmly without a word.

The bands played the National Anthems. Why can't we have a National Anthem to inspire us on these occasions, as the French anthem does them, instead of merely a personal one? Surely the British Nation, with its unsurpassedly glorious history, ought to have a truly *National* Anthem. I have the very highest admiration indeed for our King personally; and, apart from being one of his officers, I glory, as a British subject, in what he represents; but, "God save our King, and make him victorious, happy and glorious, and give him long life," doesn't satisfy me.

Men who had left Australia together, but who had become separated through being in different companies, got together again to-day; and, after warm, silent hand-shakings, they drank together in what they could get; then talked, joked, laughed and sang about the war, the Kaiser and the army life, as only Diggers can. They really let themselves go for the day; they talked to, joked with, and assisted monsieur, madame or mademoiselle, in serving the drinks, washing the glasses, or cooking the omelettes and chips, so beamingly and enthusiastically, that I am sure the inhabitants will never forget them and their contagious, free-and-easy happiness. There was singing in chorus in every estaminet

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all day; there was singing in the billets until midnight.

The Guard-mounting this afternoon was just as amusing as everyone expected it to be. The C.O. judiciously decided that, considering that some of the Guard had been celebrating, the Grande Place was too public; and, so, after everything was fixed up as well as possible, the Guard was led by the shortest route to a new mounting place against the Guard-room. We didn't expect five of them to get through the ordeal, but Diggers are stickers. Their officer to-day called them "rough but honest." All did their left turn correctly, except three who turned to the right. On the order to open ranks, the rear rank must have thought they were in Tasmania, for the majority of them looked behind before stepping back. There were wonderful happenings during the "Examine Arms!" and "Unfix Bayonets!" but at last the Armistice-celebrating Guard was led to its new quarters.

This evening I visited the company and yarned with the men. Everyone seemed happy. Only one was really drunk, but many, in their happiness, pretended to be. I heard one relating his day's experiences as follows: "We didn't paint the town red, as we might have done if it hadn't been so far from pay-day, but we celebrated all right. I 'subbed' nearly all the officers. I told the C.O. I had carried him over two years ago when he was wounded near Bois Grenier, and he gave me five 'frogs'; Cap-

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tain ———, who knew me out near Brewarrina, gave me five. I forget what I told the others, for I was becoming 'Von-Blinked.' But my best 'sub.' was the Brig. I don't remember what I told him, but I chucked him a dinkum salute and he gave me ten 'frogs.' To-night I saw a Froggy hanging up a lot of Chinese lanterns and flags, and I thought he would be good for a drink, but he didn't 'compree,' and only said 'Demain!' "

At Abbeville a Digger climbed to the top of the well-known statue to Admiral Courbet, and placed an Australian flag in his hand.

CHAPTER L

After the Armistice

THOSE at home who regard the Armistice terms as hard ought to see as much of France and Belgium as we have seen.

Our last long trek in Europe was from near Abbeville, up the Somme, across the Hindenburg Line and the Belgian Border and on to the Meuse near Dinant and Namur. It was after the Armistice.

Amiens, with its shattered station and streets, was being patched up with hessian by the inhabitants who were returning each hour of each day and night. We saw them trudging with

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their loads back along every road. One of them was a little fat girl of sixteen, who wore on her left breast both the British and French military medals and ribbons; quite genuine too. She had received them for attending British wounded up in Armentieres while the town was being shelled. She didn't seem to value them any more than brooches and ribbons; and her letters from the King and Plumer didn't seem to appeal to her at all.

And poor Villers-Bretonneux! When I saw it last, five months ago, it had a few walls and a room or two almost intact, but now it was just desolation. A few poilus were clearing a road for traffic by throwing the fallen walls back on to the old footpaths, or into shell-holes. Just heaps of smouldering rubble everywhere.

The railway line from here to Péronne was entirely new, as every rail and sleeper of the old line had been broken and twisted. There must be millions of tons of old rails lying about. Every chain of the line had been mined, and metal and broken sleepers were scattered far and wide.

Our Engineers had done wonderful work clearing up "delayed-action" mines; also in and near Péronne by bridging so rapidly the miles of swamps and canals. Into these, hundreds of broken trucks, carriages and railway engines, wagons and limbers, cookers and motor-lorries had been hurriedly thrown by the retreating Germans. Town after town, and village after

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village almost levelled with the surrounding fields!

That the enemy had intended to make farther pushes in this area, and that his retreat had been hurried, was proved by the many tremendous dumps of shells he had left behind.

We passed the commanding Mt. St. Quentin and wondered how it was we had been able to take it. Then the Hindenburg Line came into view beyond our own old maze of trenches. Dozens and dozens of belts of barbed wire still intact for miles, and many over a hundred yards in width; countless cement "pill-boxes," tremendous dugout and miles of underground passages still in perfect condition; heaps and heaps of shells and ammunition; thousands of strongly-fortified battery positions rendered, by clever camouflage, invisible even to our 'planes; deep communication trenches to assist the tunnels, and everything imaginable to make an impregnable position. And we were through this Hindenburg Line and lunching near Fresnoy-le-Grand.

We saw few dead Huns, but the wreckage of war was stupendous. Guns, mortars, dead horses by hundreds, picks, shovels, limbers, helmets, machine guns, bombs, wire and stores of a thousand varieties were lying in disordered masses everywhere.

Every now and again, a mine, treacherously left behind after the Armistice, would go up, killing soldiers, returned prisoners liberated by

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the Hun, and even civilians and children on their way back to look for their homes.

Behind the Armistice Day line, along the roads, were many signs of the Germans having become a sheer rabble. There were helmets, rifles, ammunition, respirators, packs and tons of equipment scattered everywhere, having not only been thrown away but kicked about. In places whole battalions had apparently acted spontaneously, judging by the areas covered by the litter. Even guns, motors and tractor-trains had been wantonly let run down hills and were now lying in tangled masses at the bottom.

And everywhere there were German prisoners clearing up the mines they had left at every cross road, bridge, culvert or cutting, under the supervision of Tommies who rightly stood back at judicious distances.

CHAPTER LI

The People we Fought

AT Fresnoy-le-Grand, near the source of the Somme, our first home after we crossed the Hindenburg Line, I met and conversed with many inhabitants who had just returned from Belgium, whence the Germans had sent them.

How they do hate the Boche! Can one wonder when one learns the following particu-

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lars, all supplied to me first hand by reliable residents, and, in every case, substantiated by others?

An old merchant of Bohain: "The Germans brutally kicked, punched or batoned the youths of the town on the slightest provocation. The young men had no redress. Over 2,000 residents of Fresnoy were evacuated, and fifteen died each day along the roads."

A young woman with him added: "My father died along the road. I myself was kept here to work for the dirty Boches. They beat me, and this little girl who was with me, with batons to make us work harder in the fields. They made us work within four kilometres of the front line. Their officers and soldiers were all brutal and beat the children to make them work harder."

A French baker at Fresnoy: "When the Boche pushed the Allies back in March last, we lost all heart. They became very overbearing. There were twenty thousand Germans crowded into Fresnoy in February last. The Boche stole chairs, tables, carpets, curtains, clocks, brassware—everything—and sent them into Germany. We received requisition cards sometimes, but never any payment for our property. They took all our French coins—gold, silver and copper—and jewellery, and gave us German paper money for them. They were always robbing us."

A very sad woman of Fresnoy: "The dirty Boches took my son away over four years ago,

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and I have never heard of him since."

Three women certify the following as true: "English prisoners were brutally treated and starved. Many were shot. One Tommy was found with a potato in his pocket, as he was

"Le sale Boche!"

returning from the fields, and was shot in front of your battalion orderly room, in the presence of other prisoners, without any trial. The English wounded were frightfully treated, one Boche doctor saying to us that they were swine and deserved to have their throats cut. We often heard the shrieks of the English wounded over 500 metres away. We are certain they were murdered because so many of them were buried. Many English prisoners were always barefooted,

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because the Boches stole their boots. . . . The Boches boasted that they would be in Paris in March, London in June, and that they would invade America before the end of the year."

L. Poarh, Curé or Priest of Fresnoy, whom my company entertained at dinner, said: "The Bavarians stole all my church ornaments, my vestments and even my altar. They used to come to mass in the morning to look around to see what they could come and steal in the afternoon. The Germans used my church as a prison for English and French. I was repeatedly forbidden to preach, but I persisted although they imprisoned me. I am a Breton, and we Bretons are very hard-headed. The Germans stole everything all the time. All the furniture and utensils left are quite mixed up, for if they wanted a couch, bed or any article from any house for their billet they took it. When they found they had to retreat, they burnt the furniture."

At Prisches, the people were robbed of everything of value. Our billet madame's husband had been a prisoner for over four years. She expected him to return any minute, and wondered what he would be like after his barbarous treatment; but beyond that she did not seem to be at all excited. Perhaps her outward manner didn't reflect her inward feelings. Her husband's mother sat by the stove, muttering to herself about his return. There were none of his cows, horses nor poultry left, for the

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Boche had taken them all. They had forced the farmers to deliver their milk at central creameries at their price. Madame had once kept about one-and-a-half gallons for her household; had been caught with it by the controller's spy, imprisoned and fined four hundred marks. All eggs had to be delivered to them at their own price. The whole district was quite denuded of stock.

The Boches had forgotten to steal the church bells at Priches; so the people cut the ropes, muffled them, and kept them quiet for over four years, until the day the English arrived.

"Ah! les Anglais!" madame exclaimed, "how the sight of them coming across the muddy fields made us forget those terrible years! And they were such young boys, so gentlemanly, so brave!"

At Sivry, in Belgium, the Germans had shot even school children. One was a little girl who had run up to the column of weary starving English prisoners to give a "galette" (cake) to one of them. She was immediately shot without any questioning. Three people confirmed this and pointed out the place. They also stated that the Germans treated the Belgian prisoners fairly well, paying them small amounts for their labour, but the French and English—especially the English—they treated barbarously, taking their boots from them, and butting them with their rifles on every possible occasion. English

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prisoners were often shot and many died of privations.

At Silenrieux, the Belgians confirmed the above statements of the barbarous treatment of English prisoners—"les sales Boches!"

M. Buisseret, a merchant, said: "The Germans burnt my home after looting it, although it was not in the war area. They shot several civilians here for no reason at all, and even little children were shot in the district."

The Burgomaster of Dinant issued pamphlets to us which read:

"In Dinant-on-Meuse, the Germans shot down in cold blood on the 23rd and 24th August, 1914, 650 inhabitants, among whom were 80 women, 18 children of less than fourteen years, and eight children of less than thirty months. The latter were 'franc-tireurs,' too!

(Signed) Fr. Bribosia,
Burgomaster."

I shall not soil these pages with the many sadder details reported to me.

CHAPTER LII

The People we Fought for

THAT the French évacué's, returning wearily to their looted homes behind the Hindenburg Line, appreciated our thoughfulness and sympathy for them, was very

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evident everywhere we went. For example, at Fresnoy-le-Grand, they returned from Belgium to find five of us billeted in their untenanted house. We offered to leave, except for one attic room for the five, but they insisted on our keeping all, except two rooms for themselves—four women and two men. We gave them our hot dinner and helped them shift some furniture. It was too much for them after four years of Hun brutality; they fairly broke down and wept copiously. Then one suddenly jumped on a chair and felt on top of a high wardrobe. Their tears suddenly changed into unbounded joy as she handed down a copper coffee-pot and two umbrellas they had hidden there from the Boches.

The priest, who saw the Australians in every house he visited, and heard the people's opinions, told us that there was similar joyful weeping everywhere at the novelty of being spoken to kindly and treated sympathetically . He wrote in my book: "Fresnoy-le-Grand will always most fondly remember the passage of the Australian troops."

It was the same in Belgium, as we camped for a night, or rested for weeks. "Silenrieux retains happy memories of the Australians," wrote M. Buisseret, a leading citizen of that district, to me. The people of Florennes, where we spent a month, insisted, like the other southern Belgians, in doing for us all their impoverished means would allow. Here, the men's billets

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were at first somewhat cramped, as our army strove to inconvenience the people as little as possible; but this crowding was speedily remedied by the inhabitants themselves inviting as many as they could to sleep at their homes.

When I visited my company the first evening we were there, thirty men informed me they had found good homes. Those who remained in billets slept on straw donated by a farmer, for which we would willingly have given him £10. After a month here, a prominent townsman, who, prior to the war had been attached to the Belgian Embassy in Rome, asked me to allow him to write something for our battalion journal. One item reads: "We shall keep for a long time the splendid remembrances we have of the amiable officers of the 13th Australian Battalion. The several days spent with them have been marked by a true sympathy and a real friendship! We shall particularly remember you whom we have been able to appreciate so much.

Eugene Baix,
Florennes."

It seemed hard for those, who remembered the coarse, hardened Flemings, or Flamands, we had met near Steenwoorde and Poperinghe, and whom most of us called Belgians, to realize that these people, so clean, so hospitable and thoughtful, were also Belgians.

It was indeed an agreeable surprise to find such a contrast, especially as we were prepared to put up with every hardship on our journey

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through to Germany, in order to make things as easy as possible for the inhabitants, after their German treatment. Our General had asked us to do this, telling us, however, that when we reached Germany, we should show we were masters and that there, there should be no question as to whether a Digger or a German should have a bed.

But there are two distinct races in Belgium, Walloons and Flamands, the only national tie between them being that of the Catholic religion. The Walloons hate the Flamands, as far as we could judge; their cleanliness, homeliness, loveableness, and hospitality got right to the Diggers' hearts. We could also "parley" with them, as we couldn't with the Flamands, for the Walloons speak "better French than the French."

As we marched through Sivry, we remarked the shining windows and walls of all the homes. I had a clean bed in a room with shining walls, floor and windows; and at each town it was the same. I mentioned to the family I was billeted with the difference between the two races in hospitality. Madame replied: "Ah, Monsieur! beware of the Flamands. A Flamand comes with a prayer-book in one hand and a knife in the other."

I admired the shining condition of every part of the house. She was very pleased and remarked: "A Walloon woman's greatest delight is in being clean and industrious in her home; a

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French woman's greatest delight is to be stylish in the streets of Paris."

At Florennes, I was told that the people were afraid of the Flamands working in the district; and that the Flamands of Ghent, Bruges and Ypres were mainly German sympathisers.

That the Boche had aimed, in his German way, at treating the Belgians less barbarously than the French, was exemplified as we crossed the border. On one corner was a great mass of ruins —all that was left of two French farms; on the other corner, in Belgium, but only fifty yards away, were a Belgian farm and estaminet quite untouched, except for their brass door knobs, window-locks and copper utensils, which had been commandeered. Still, in spite of these crude attempts not to embitter the Belgians too much, they had failed, for there's a lifelong hatred of them, right throughout the south of Belgium at least.

To mock the retreating Germans, the Belgians everywhere brought out all the brass and copper articles they had been able to hide safely, and placed them on the doorsteps and window sills, all polished up for the occasion. I was shown some of the hiding-places—in chimneys, under fireplaces, in walls, in boxes in the ground. Every house still proudly shows a few door-knobs, copper kettle or similar articles, all placed in prominent positions. I mentioned that I thought it petty to deride the retreating enemy

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in this way, but they replied: "Ah, Monsieur! you don't know the Germans—les sales Boches —and you can never imagine how strongly we shall for ever hate them. It was good to show them that they had not cowed us altogether."

They had been in the habit of washing for, and waiting on, the Germans, without pay; and the habit had grown on them to such an extent that Madame was quite astonished, the first week I was there, when I asked "How much?" for the washing she had found in my room and done for me. They were more astonished when I told them we would let them do nothing for us without pay.

There was great excitement in the house when my batman brought in some Sunlight soap from the canteen. They had not seen good soap since the war started, all fats having been commandeered. There was similar excitement when I brought in a cup of sugar from our mess, and a child, aged five, didn't know what chocolate was. He soon found out, however, and acted like Oliver Twist.

In Charleroi I met a horse-shoe nail manufacturer who was on a secret committee to help British prisoners during the war. They passed one out to a hiding-place in a forest hut, where, each day, a wood-cutter took him food. In Charleroi, itself, this committee did risky work. Each night, after midnight, a few boats with muffled oars, were rowed across the canal at the rear of the English cage. The prisoners took it

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in turns to fill the boats, were taken to a well-hidden building, given a hot meal, and then rowed back again. And this had gone on for over two years. This same manufacturer had exported, during 1917, seventy tons of horse-shoe nails to England, via Holland and Switzerland. Before the Boche retreat they took his machinery to Germany. He was to have revenge, however, and proudly showed me an official pass to visit Germany, and an order to the Belgian Army of Occupation to assist him in his visits to German factories for the purpose of choosing such machinery as he liked, and to give him the necessary military aid to remove it back to Charleroi. "And I shall have a far more up-to-date factory than I had before," he added.

I have mentioned one contribution by a Belgian to our Battalion Journal. The two following contributions show much of Belgian character:

I. UNDER THE GERMANS—

"During the four-and-a-half years of German occupation we lived under a reign of terror. From their arrival in Belgium the Boches showed themselves true barbarians, advancing into the country with a torch in one hand and a sword in the other, marking their passage by pillage, burnings and murders. They made our pretty little Dinant a heap of ashes. Many other towns were burnt and their inhabitants shot

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Kultur!

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under the pretext of being 'franc-tireurs' (free-shooters). Children under two years of age—also undoubtedly franc-tireurs!—were shot.

"Oh, the Boches; how we hate them! They imagined that by terrorizing us they would keep us under their heel. They thought that 1914 would be quickly forgotten, but they knew not the Belgians, and the Belgians had learnt to know them. We smiled, the Boches were pleased. How little did they know that our smile was a smile of mockery! Our pleasure was to deceive them, and our glory was to play the farce to them in our fashion. On their retreat they were chagrined to see the brass and copper that we had kept hidden from them in spite of their frequent searchings, shining on our doorsteps."

II. A JOKE AGAINST THE HUNS—

"All newspapers were suppressed by the Germans, except those printed under their supervision, which were issued to cause dissension among the Belgians, and a hatred of England. Happily, many had the courage to expose these Boche plans, and some suffered terribly for it.

"However, there appeared each week a little journal called *Free Belgium*, printed and distributed secretly. It was read right throughout Belgium and kept up the spirit of the Belgians, by showing up the Boche lies, and by giving reassuring news of the situation. After reading it we felt comforted, courageous, and confident

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of the future. The Germans were furious, but they could not find the printers nor distributors. It specially mocked the German Governor-General, to whom a copy was mysteriously delivered each week. He was enraged.

"Now one day he received an anonymous letter telling him where to find the press. What good luck! At last he could punish the printers. Instructions were given for a strong party to visit the place. A long search, much opening of doors, climbing of stairs and ladders, and crawling through dirty places in the slums of Brussels, at last brought them to the exact spot. They rushed the place with fixed bayonets, smashed in the door and found——a W.C.!

"The next morning the Governor-General mysteriously received a photo of the final charge against the door."

And, finally, the Belgian flag they took me to see at Sivry! There it was, still flying proudly as it had flown, from the top of the two-storied Mairie, since August, 1914—before the first German arrived. A small one with now faded colours. It had been hauled up on its pole and fixed so that it could not be drawn down. From only one part of a certain street could it be seen, and so the Hun had not seen it. But every day for over four years had my friends and others walked along just that portion of the street to gaze on it. Never a day had they missed it. The red and black symbolized the blood shed for their country and the darkness of German occu-

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pation; and the yellow the light they had longed for, and had now found. It had brought to them, each day during the long four years, a little joy —even if only of derision against their tyrants. The lad, who had put it there so firmly, had gone into the Belgian army, and had not been heard of since.

Surely it is good for us to be remembered lovingly by such simple, lovable people. May they long treasure our memories, with their coffee-pots, door-knobs and that little flag.

CHAPTER LIII

The Diggers as Soldiers

THE war was over, but the hospitals were still full. I sat at a ward-table with a dozen Imperial officers, and a jolly happy crowd we were when we got to understand each other. They were from East Africa, Mesopotamia, Palestine, Salonika and the Western Front. We didn't talk much war, but one night an officer of the Scottish Borderers remarked that he thought the Australians were the best fighters in the war, and that it was a great pity they were not better at discipline. This seemed to be the opinion of all present, although some expressed the opinion that the Guards were equal to the Australians as fighters. The fact that they were all Active Service Officers made

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me feel proud of this tribute—so spontaneous and unanimous—regarding the Australians' fighting quality.

But, in a friendly way, I pointed out that I thought any British regiment with the training and tradition of the Guards, and especially if they were used just as the Guards were, would equal them in every way.

"I have the highest admiration for the Guards, and recognize that their achievements have been wonderful, and that they have never gone back on the highest British traditions; but they are used solely for special stunts. They are then taken out, right away from fatigues, and kept out until something special is again required of them. Your other British Regiments, and the Australians too, are not only called upon to fight, and act as storm-troops or forlorn-hopes, but when their attacking, raiding and defending are done, they have still to hold on—digging, carrying, wiring, patrolling, duckboarding, draining, revetting, running, pumping — sodden and shivering—for week after week, and even year after year. Can you expect these men not to be somewhat 'slack'—if you call it so—when they get away from this almost constant environment?

"When you hold your splendid Guards up for special deeds, don't forget what the ordinary Tommy of London, Devon, Yorkshire, or anywhere else; or the ordinary Jock from Liverpool,

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London, Glasgow or Aberdeen, has been all the time!"

But "Better Discipline," in their opinion, would still be an advantage to the Australians, without detracting from their recognized fighting qualities.

"Do you hold the British sailor up as equal to your best in fighting and discipline?" I asked.

"We do that!" they emphatically agréed.

"Well, in my opinion, the Diggers are in many ways like your sailors. They do their battalion duties thoroughly; but when they, or your Jack Tars, are away from their units, some of them are not conventionally correct in matters of general dress, sobriety, conversation and even saluting. The 'off-duty' conduct of your sailors is not noticed because you see so many of them, and because they keep down in their usual haunts in the ports; but the Australian and his uniform are new to you, and they get everywhere.

"I have seen your naval officers walking through the streets near your docks among dozens of rollicking sailors without being noticed, let alone saluted."

I was becoming garrulous, for we were a pleasant company.

"And it's my opinion," I continued, "that the average Digger salutes more than the average Tommy." This caused a general laugh.

"Well, I'll bet a dinner all round I can prove it to your satisfaction."

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Several wanted to accept, so I agreed to take them in turns if they still wanted it after the first had paid for his dinners.

The next evening an officer of "The Lions" and myself spent two hours walking Whitehall, Strand, Trafalgar Square, Haymarket and Piccadilly. We had agreed to take the percentage of salutes received from men passing us on the same footpath.

Apart from the dinner, I felt it a point of honour to win. So I wore my Digger hat, and besides trying to catch every Digger's eye, on two occasions, when I felt I was slipping I half-commenced the salute myself. I also smiled at two others who would otherwise not have "seen" us. In this way out of nineteen Australians we passed, seventeen saluted; while out of twenty-three Tommies only fifteen saluted.

As my friend paid for the dinners, he remarked: "Your Australian hat must have done the trick."

"It was a good deal more than that," I replied.

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CHAPTER LIV

CHARLES AND JEANNE

CHARLES, my batman, was soon quite established with Monsieur, Madame and Mademoiselle, at whose place I was billeted. They assisted him in his work for me, he them in their house and field work. They "parleyed" together far more easily and with better understanding than they and I could, although I believed myself some French scholar.

It was dark, and Jeanne had not come in from the fields. Charles was anxious and questioned Monsieur:

"Mamselle beaucoup late. Compree 'late?'"

"Non, Monsieur Charles, pas compree 'late.'"

There was a pause while Charles looked up "late" in his dictionary.

"Mamselle beaucoup tard."

"Oh, oui; oh, oui, monsieur; beaucoup tard sher shoir!" (plenty late this evening).

"Pourquoi?" (Why?)

"Mamselle beaucoup travay dans les champs." (Mademoiselle plenty work in the fields).

"Avec les —— you compree —— 'swede turnips?'"

"Non, monsieur, pas compree." (No, no understand).

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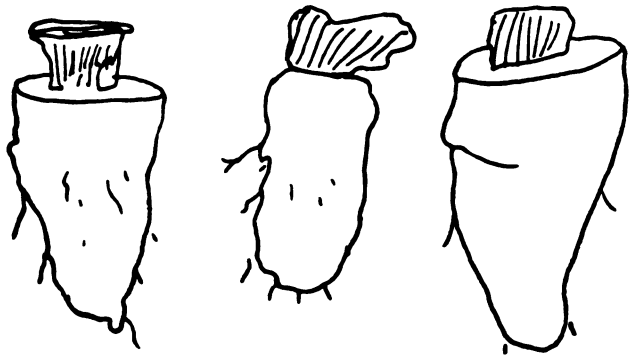
Another pause, while Charles searches, unsuccessfully, for "swede turnip" in his dictionary.

"Pas ici, monsieur; swede turnip." (Not here).

"Pas la, monsieur?" (Not there?)

"Nong!" (No.)

Then Charles got a brainwave. Out with his pencil and paper. Soon he showed monsieur this:



"Oh! les betteraves, monsieur!" ("beet!")

"Vous nommez comme ca 'betteraves?'" (You name like that "betteraves?")

"Oui, monsieur, oui!"

"Betteraves! Better-alves! Something like 'better 'oles!'" repeats Charles, to fix "swede turnips" and "betteraves" together in his mind.

Enter Madame and Mademoiselle Jeanne, in their stockings, having kicked off their wooden sabots on the doorstep.

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After "bonsoiring" (Good evening) all round, and some rapid French between Madame, Monsieur and Jeanne. Charles recommenced:

"You tray fatiguay, mamselle Jeanne?" (You very tired, Miss Jeanne?)

"Non, Monsieur Charles! Pourquoi me fatiguée?" (No, Mr. Charles! Why me tired?)

"Vous avez beaucoup travay aujourd'hui!" (You have plenty worked to-day!)

"Pas trop!" (Not too much.)

"Vous avez travay pour quatorze heures, mamselle." (You have worked for fourteen hours.)

"C'en ferian. Quatorze heures pas trop!" (That's nothing. Fourteen hours not too much.)

"Oui, mamselle. Quatorze heures beaucoup trop pour vous." (Yes, Miss. Fourteen hours plenty too much for you.)

"Pourquoi?"

"En Australie les mamselles pas beaucoup travay comme ca; jamais." (In Australia girls not plenty work like that; never.)

"En Australie les desmoiselles beaucoup swank n'est-ce pas?" (In Australia the girls plenty swank, don't they?)

"Mamselle Australie jamais travay avec les betteraves." (Miss Australia never works with the swede turnips.)

"Vous avez plentee fiancées en Australie?"

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"Nong, mamselle! Jamais!" (No, Miss, never!)

"Plentee fiancées en Angleterre?" (Plenty sweethearts in England?)

"Nong, nong! Jamais! Mamselle Jeanne!"

"Pas fiancée? Vous? (No sweetheart? You?)

"Nong! pas fiancée. Jamais!"

Madame and Mademoiselle now commenced eating their soup and bread. Charles gave Monsieur a cigarette and a packet of issue tobacco, and then studied his dictionary.

. . . . . .

Later on that night as I passed through the kitchen I saw Charles and Jeanne studying each other's language from a school-book—and also studying each other's hand-clasps and eyes.

Still later I heard from my adjoining room:

"You my fiancée, Jeanne?"

"Vous beaucoup fiancées en Australie!"

"Nong! Jamais! Jeanne."

"Pas marie?" (not married). A burst of laughter was Charles' reply to this.

"Pas fiancée en Angleterre?"

"Nong! Jamais! Jeanne."

"Pas fiancée de tout?" (No sweetheart at all?)

"Nong! Nong! Pas de tout! J'aime *vous* Jeanne; *vous! vous!*" (None at all! I love you, Jeanne, you! you!)

"Australie beaucoup kilomètres?" (Australia plenty far?)

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"Oui, beaucoup: mais très bon voyage!"

Jeanne brought forth an atlas, and together they studied Australia; Jeanne asking about lions, tigers, snakes, negroes and kangaroos; but always being reassured by Charles.

At last the lesson was finished. That Jeanne was satisfied was evident, for she remarked:

"Australie beaucoup kilomètres, mais Australie très bon; voyage très bon; les soldats très bons. J'aime beaucoup Australie." (Australia plenty kilometres, but Australia very good; voyage very good; the soldiers very good. I like Australia very much.)

"You my fiancée, Jeanne?"

"Peut-être, Charles. Après la guerre."

"J'aime vous beaucoup, plenty, Jeanne!"

"Je vous aime aussi, Charles; un petit peu!" (I love you also, Charles; a little bit!)

"Voulez-vous promenader à Australie avec moi après la guerre, Jeanne?" (Will you come to Australia with me, after the war, Jeanne?)

"Peut-être! Après la guerre, peut-être! Maintenant bon soir, Charles!" (Perhaps! After the war, perhaps! Now, good-night, Charles!)

"Bon soir, ma chèrie Jeanne!"

. . . . . .

The next morning, while I was shaving, Charles confided to me his feelings towards Jeanne.

"She'd make a bosker little wife for a cove out on a bit of farm like mine, wouldn't she? And

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she's quite a decent kid—not like those we used to meet up near Steenvoorde; they're as rough as goats'-knees."

. . . . . .

Shortly after this we moved forward. Charles, acting as my runner, was wounded and got to "Blighty," and we didn't meet again in France.

It was out at sea on board the *Kaiser-i-Hind* that we next came across each other. We were a happy crowd aboard on our way to dear old Australia. I was doing the rounds of the ship as Orderly Officer when we met.

"Come along with me, sir, and see my souvenir."

I followed him to the "married" part of the ship.

"This is my little souvenir from France," he remarked, as Jeanne, blushing radiantly, and I shook hands.

I couldn't resist it. "Voulez-vous promenader à Australie avec Charles, Mamselle Jeanne?"

Her eyes sparkled, and she again blushed at the recollection of Charles' courting way back among the roses of Picardy, as she replied:

"Oui, Monsieur, après la guerre!"

. . . . . .

The welcome at Fremantle and delightful, pretty Perth! How we shall ever remember that first bit of Diggerland on our return! And everything real Australian again! Especially the girls.

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Walking up the gangway back on to the boat I heard a sergeant say:

"I came an awful gutser this evening, in Perth."

"How was that?" I asked.

"Well, I mistook an Aussie girl for a Blighty girl."

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